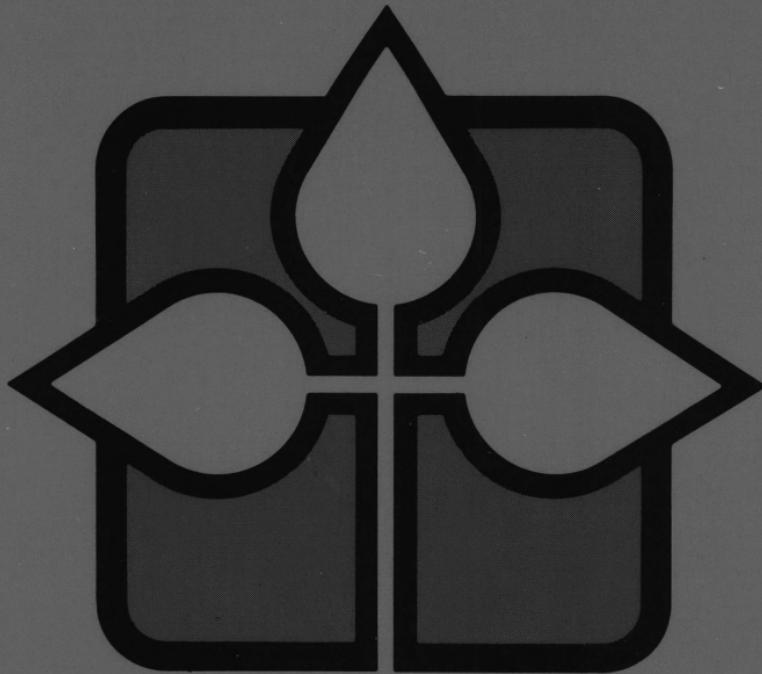


# JOHN

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Devotional  
Studies On  
LIVING ETERNALLY



J. ALLEN BLAIR



**JOHN**  
Devotional  
Studies on  
**LIVING ETERNALLY**

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# JOHN

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Studies On  
LIVING ETERNALLY

J. ALLEN BLAIR



**Glad Tidings, Inc.**

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*Dedicated  
to  
all the faithful believers  
who have helped us buy the radio time  
to broadcast the truth of God since the  
founding of Glad Tidings*



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## INTRODUCTION

Someone has said that the Gospel of John is "the greatest Book in the world." Another has declared it to be "the greatest love story ever told." No one would dare surmise how many lives have been drawn to Christ and transformed by this Gospel.

Before his conversion, John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, had been a rugged fisherman casting nets on the Sea of Galilee. Though not named in the narrative, he simply refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This does not denote pride, but rather deep humiliation. It was the profound exaltation of the love of God which had drawn the wayward John to the Lord Jesus. John never ceased to marvel at this love which had changed his life completely.

The Gospel of John was written at a much later date than the first three Gospels. Truth had been perverted and the deity of Christ had been questioned. God laid His hand upon John to write the fourth Gospel to counteract this heresy, that all the peoples of the world might hear that Jesus is the Son of God. The purpose is stated clearly in John 20:30-31: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that . . . ye might have life through His name."

Seven miracles are emphasized in the Gospel in order to present Jesus as the Son of God. Certain significant words are also used to portray this truth, such as "believe" — 98 times, "love" — 54 times, "life" — 43 times, "truth" — 27 times, "light" — 23 times, and "witness" — 22 times.

One can hardly read this Gospel without realizing the claim on his soul for salvation. Repeatedly in various ways John

presents the truth of the gospel that those who read might believe on Christ and experience the privilege of *living eternally*.

But not only is the fourth Gospel an evangelistic book; it is a source of blessing to the true believer. It is filled with comfort and help. It provides inspiration and guidance. It should be read and reread time and time again. Millions in our troubled world need to know the Gospel of John, that they might experience the peace the Lord Jesus speaks about in this book.

The study of the Gospel of John will be more understandable if you know Christ. If you do not know Him, there is no better time than now to acknowledge Him as your Saviour and Lord. Simply bow your head and invite Him to come into your life. Following this experience, the study of this Gospel will thrill you over and over as you revel in the glorious truth of *living eternally*.

J. ALLEN BLAIR

# 1

## THE MIGHTY CHRIST

*John 1:1-5*

In the opening verses of the Gospel, John immediately began his task of presenting Jesus as the eternal Son of God. In verses one and two, Christ is seen in His relationship to God the Father; in verse three, in His relationship to creation; and in verses four and five, in His relationship to men.

Consider Christ in His relationship to God the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." Three things are said about the Word in these verses: the Word is eternal, personal, and supernatural. John in speaking of "the Word" means Jesus Christ. As an invisible thought is expressed by a corresponding word, Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. We are assured from the fourteenth verse that the Word is Christ: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." God in the person of Christ assumed a body of flesh and came to dwell upon this earth.

The Word is eternal. "In the beginning *was* the Word." This is the basis upon which Christ gives eternal life. Because He Himself is eternal, He has the power and authority to give eternal life to all who believe. "In the beginning," does not mean that Christ began at the beginning, but rather at the beginning of time and creation He already existed. He is without beginning and without ending.

"The Word was *with* God." Christ is personal. Though He is God, one with the Father, yet He is a distinct personality. He always has been and He will continue to be. He declared in John 10:30, "I and My Father are one." He is of the same

substance as the Father, very God. But at the same time He is a separate personality.

“The Word was God.” As God, Jesus Christ is supernatural. Repeatedly, when He was upon the earth He gave evidence that He was God. He raised the dead; He gave sight to the blind; He healed the lepers; and He performed many other miracles, providing conclusive credentials of His deity. He knew all about those with whom He conversed. No one had to tell Him about the woman at the well. Even though He had never seen her before, He knew her entire past. No one had to brief Him on Nathanael; He knew that this was an Israelite in whom there was no guile.

Jesus Christ is the eternal God. The apostle reiterates this great truth: “The same was in the beginning with God.” This is actually a summary of verse one. How wonderful to know that Jesus Christ, who existed with the Father from eternity, lives today.

Considering Christ in His relationship to creation, John tells us: “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” All of creation was brought into existence through the creative fiat and power of God the Son. The Apostle Paul substantiates this truth in Colossians 1:16 where he wrote of Christ: “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” Jesus Christ is the Creator.

In verses four and five we see Christ’s relationship to men. John says of the Lord Jesus, “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” We may be certain that only in Him can life be found. The apostle is speaking here of eternal life. This life is not found in sinful humans. God says in Isaiah 64:6, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Christ did not come to save those who could save themselves. In Luke 19:10 we read, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Without Him man is eternally lost, without God and without hope. Man has nothing he can offer to God for salvation, for he is vile, deserving eternal condemnation.

"And the life was the light of men." Suddenly the life becomes light. As one receives eternal life through Christ, he receives also light to guide him over the dark paths of the world in which he lives. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 we are told: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." As the sun was created to bring light into the darkness of the world, Christ was sent to give light to the souls of men. After one comes to Christ, he possesses the power to live for the Lord.

"The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." "Comprehend" as used here is really the word "apprehend." What a tragedy that many thousands of needy men and women refuse to receive the light of the gospel of Christ!

## THE TRUE LIGHT

*John 1:6-13*

After telling us about the Eternal Word, John suddenly provides a remarkable transition. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Though the Lord Jesus is the Eternal God, the Creator of the universe, He is not independent of man. In His divine planning, He has ordained that born-again believers be His heralds of truth.

John the Baptist was a "sent" man, recognizing that he was in the world not to satisfy his own wants and desires, but to live for God and to be a witness for Him. Paul exhorts believers in Romans 6:11, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our

Lord." The sent man will realize the importance of letting Christ live through him. As a channel of blessing, he will grasp the opportunities to do the work of the Lord.

The apostle elaborates as to why John the Baptist came: "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe." "All men" as used in this verse does not mean all mankind but that all who should hear John's faithful witness would "through him," that is, through his witness, have an opportunity to believe.

John the Baptist "was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." He was a messenger to tell people about the true Light. Jesus said of him in John 5:35, "He was a burning and a shining light." "Light" as used by our Lord in describing John means *a reflector of the true source of Light*. Christ is the only source of Light, but those who believe on Him are reflectors of the Light.

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." From this verse, it might seem that every human born into the world has divine light within him. Some speak of the spark of divinity in man, which, if fanned, can blaze forth into a life of holiness and usefulness. Thus, according to this view, by his own efforts man could gain his own salvation. Such is not taught in the Bible. The phrase "cometh into the world" does not refer to *man* but rather to *the true Light*. We might read the verse, "That was the true Light that cometh into the world to provide light for every man." Because Christ came into the world, died on the cross, and rose again, salvation is available for all. But to experience this salvation, one must receive Christ personally.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." The Lord Jesus was in the world long before Bethlehem, and He is still in the world. But in spite of this, it can be said in our day that the world knows Him not. Probably nothing is more common than unbelief, which we perceive on every hand. God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son. Christ lives today, pleading with men and women to believe on Him. But they know Him not.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." This means that "He came unto His own" *things*, "and His own" *people* "received Him not." The first "own" is in the neuter gender, referring to "things." The second is in the masculine gender, referring to "people." Everything in the world belongs to God. Though we boast of our possessions, God declares in Psalm 50:10,12, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof." Christ came into this world which He created and which He rightfully owned, and His own people, the Jews, received Him not. Of all people, His chosen ones should have received Him and believed on Him when He came. Throughout the history of the Jews, He had manifested His grace toward them. He delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. He protected and preserved them from the onslaughts of the wicked nations. Repeatedly, their own prophets had foretold the Messiah's coming. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). The Jewish people knew all about the Messiah. They had adequate knowledge, but when He came they failed to receive Him.

Though there are many who reject Christ, there are always some who will believe on Him. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." The word "power" in this verse does not mean *strength* or *ability*. One does not receive strength through Christ to become a Christian through human achievement. This word for "power" is used 102 times in the New Testament, and always means "right" or "privilege." Those who receive Christ are granted the privilege of becoming the children of God immediately, the moment they believe.

"Son" should be translated "children." This is one of John's favorite expressions, both in his Gospel and his Epistles. The Apostle Paul speaks of "sons." "Children" means "born ones." After a child was born into the Roman family, he was placed by his father into the hands of a tutor who lived with the child and

taught and trained him in every respect until the age of twelve. Then he was examined and, if found acceptable, he was recognized as a full-grown son. We become little children by faith in Jesus Christ, born into the family of God. But even more than that, the Bible teaches that immediately we are adopted, or placed into the family as full-grown sons. How wonderful is the mercy and grace of our Lord!

The last phrase of the verse leaves no question as to who the children of God are: "even to them that believe on His name." No one has ever been saved without believing on Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:26 says, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

John offers a further description of God's true children: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." The word "born" used here refers to the new birth. It is the first usage of the word in the New Testament. It refers to that miraculous experience whereby when one believes on Christ he is transformed by the power of Christ. This transaction is not of blood. That is, one is not a Christian because he had godly parents, or a godly ancestry. He must be born again or born from above. Nor is one a child of God by the will of the flesh. One's own efforts cannot produce salvation. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). Flesh can never be anything other than flesh. Jesus said in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Nor can one be born again by the will of man, that is, through the efforts of another. No priest can make another a Christian. Confirmation does not make one a Christian. How then does one become a child of God? The last three words of the verse are clear, "but of God." God is the only One who can give new life to the believing heart.

While speaking at a Bible conference I met a lovely couple from Michigan. The wife told me how she came to Christ a few years before. She was in an automobile wreck. Her mother-in-law seated next to her was killed instantly. When her sister

came to see her in the hospital, the injured woman began to cry as she asked, "Why didn't God take me instead of my mother-in-law?" The mother-in-law had been a true believer in Christ. The sister, a radiant Christian, replied, "You know why God took her and not you." The injured woman knew that if she had died, she would have been lost forever. Thus at that very moment she received Jesus Christ into her heart. Her life was changed. Soon her husband believed also. Both of them entered into the blessedness of following Christ.

But why should anyone wait for a wreck or some other calamity before coming to Christ? Now is the time to turn to Christ and receive life eternal with the assurance of facing death ready to meet Him.

## GOD BECAME MAN

*John 1:14-18*

One of the most profound mysteries of the New Testament is the Incarnation, the eternal Christ clothing Himself with a body of flesh. Probably more heresies have arisen from this doctrine than any other truth in the Bible.

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The eternal, personal, supernatural Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us. A more literal translation would be, "The word *became* flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word, Christ Jesus, was not a created being; He had always existed. In His Incarnation He continued as God but added a body of flesh to His Spirit.

We should not overlook the fact that as Christ became flesh He did so through a miracle. He was born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Ghost. This miraculous birth was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, hundreds of years before He was born:

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." "Immanuel" means "God with us." We have the counterpart of this prophecy in the words of the angel to Joseph: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

It has been said by some that it is not necessary to believe in the virgin birth to be a Christian. When one says he does not believe in the virgin birth, what he actually means is that he does not believe in the Bible, the miraculous power of God, nor the purity and holiness of Christ. If Christ did not have a miraculous entry into this world, as told by God in the Scriptures, then we must rule out all the rest.

"Flesh" as used here does not mean "sinful nature," as we find it in the Epistles, but rather "human nature." Christ became a human like all humans in every respect but one. He hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, became weary, slept, had compassion, became angry; but with all of this He was without sin. He looked like other humans: God sent Christ "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3).

Christ "became flesh and dwelt among us." "Dwelt" comes from a word meaning "tabernacled." The Old Testament Tabernacle was the place where man met God. Christ is the New Testament Tabernacle where man may meet God. "He *tabernacled* among us," that we might meet God through Him. Oh, how marvelous is the grace of God!

John says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." This does not mean that His glory was but a duplication of the Father's glory. It was the same glory—"full of grace and truth." All we know about grace and truth is what we know about Jesus Christ: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Here is grace in its fullest measure: the perfect Son of God taking your sin and mine and going to the cross, the innocent suffering for the guilty.

Christ is also truth. In John 14:6 He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." Everything He said was truth. Everything He did was in the light of the truth, for He is Truth.

"John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me." No wonder John bare witness of Him. All believers should be doing the same thing.

On Christmas night, several years ago, we drove up one street and down another, admiring the lighted decorations, which always suggest to me the One who is the true Light. In one of the fashionable neighborhoods, where most of the decorations highlighted Santa Claus, we were pleasantly surprised to see a lovely home with a sign, attractively painted and beautifully lighted: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." By the curb there was a lighted tract rack so constructed that one could drive near it and reach out for a gospel tract. How thrilled we were to see this witness to Christ.

John "cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me." The word "before" appears twice, but the meanings are different. The first usage refers to "position" and "dignity." John is saying, "I am nothing; He is everything." The second usage refers to "time" or "existence": "He was before me." The interesting thing is that the Lord Jesus was born approximately six months after John. How then could He be before John? John knew that Christ was eternal. Thus, "He was before me." Christ had always existed.

"And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." Is there anything Christ lacks? He has everything, all power, deity, perfect humanity. All that Christ is and has, we receive in Him. Paul said in Colossians 2:9-10, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Notice two things: "the law was given," but "grace came." "Was given" means that Moses, God's

messenger, received the law from God and conveyed it to the children of Israel. On the other hand, "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Christ was not a messenger or servant conveying the message; He was grace and truth Himself. He came bearing grace and truth to all who would believe on Him.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." But did not Abraham, Moses, Jacob, and Isaac see the Lord? No, they saw manifestations of the Lord. God is a spirit, His only visible manifestation is Christ. God declared in Exodus 33:20, "There shall no man see Me, and live." The Old Testament appearances seem to be the preincarnate Christ.

John says the Lord Jesus "is in the bosom of the Father." This is figurative, suggesting the intimacy of the Son and the Father. Further, it means that they shared all their secrets, the secrets of eternity, providence, creation, judgment, and everything having to do with the eternal counsels of God.

Christ has "declared God the Father." The word "declared" means "expounded or exegeted." Every Greek scholar knows that "exegesis" is a literal interpretation of a text from the original language in which it was written. Christ came to interpret all truth regarding the Eternal God. All that any of us know about God is realized through Christ.

Do you want to know God better? Then get better acquainted with Christ, for He is God. Take time to study His Word. He said in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures . . . they are they which testify of Me." Spend time with Him in the fellowship of prayer. Give Him the preeminence in your life.

### JUST A VOICE

*John 1:19-28*

Great crowds of people had gathered in the wilderness to hear the unusual preacher clothed in camel's hair. John's fame had

spread all around the countryside. Curiosity seekers were coming from every direction. As John the Baptist boldly proclaimed his message of repentance, many responded and were baptized.

It was not long, however, before word of John's popularity reached the ecclesiastical leaders among the Jews in Jerusalem. Feeling that John's coming might have been the fulfillment of one of the Old Testament predictions, they sent a delegation of priests and Levites to probe into John's identity. Surrounding him they asked abruptly, "Who art thou?" "He confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ." John did not try to hedge; he looked at these cultured dignitaries and boldly told the truth. The words "denied not" mean that he did not conceal anything but gave them the facts.

John is to be admired for his courage. He was a man of God, and true believers always speak the truth regardless of the cost. God says in Proverbs 13:5, "A righteous man hateth lying."

John's answer to their question suggests that possibly these men thought he was the Messiah of the Old Testament. They knew that he was the son of Zacharias, a priest, and thus a Levite. For this reason, it could be that he was the one predicted to come into the world to rule over Israel. He was quick to inform them that he was not the promised Messiah. They interrogated him further, "What then? Art thou Elias?" "Elias" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Elijah." The question asked was not unreasonable, for we read in Malachi 4:5, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." The Jews looked for the coming of Elijah to be the forerunner of the Messiah. But John assured them that he was not Elijah.

John's reply appears to be a contradiction of what Christ said about him in Matthew 11:14: "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." But there is no conflict here, for if you will note the relative passages of Scripture carefully you will see that there are two coming of Elijah. The first is a spiritual coming, fulfilled in John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ's coming to die. The second is a literal coming, preparing the way for Christ's return to reign. Consequent-

ly John the Baptist spoke and labored in the spirit of Elijah. This seems to be borne out also in Matthew 17:11-12, as Jesus spoke of both Elijah and John: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them."

Next the religious leaders asked, "Art thou that prophet?" Again John answered in the negative. Doubtless they had in mind the prophecy recorded by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." Evidently the Jews did not realize that the "Prophet" spoken of in this passage and the Messiah were one and the same. But John assured them that he was not "that prophet."

These men must have been puzzled as they talked with John. Here he was, the son of the priest Zacharias, preaching with unusual power and effectiveness; he was not Christ, he was not Elijah, he was not the Prophet.

"Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?" Having told them who he was not, John proceeded to tell them who he was, quoting from an Old Testament prophecy with which these men were familiar, Isaiah 40:3. Indeed, he was the fulfillment of prophecy but not as this delegation had surmised. John declared, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." John was not to perform miracles, nor was he to seek followers for himself. He was to call men and women unto repentance and baptize them unto repentance in preparation for the Messiah who was soon to appear. This faithful servant of God had little to say about himself, for he was simply a "voice of one crying in the wilderness." The "wilderness" is symbolical of the barrenness of Israel in John's day regarding spiritual things. John was a "voice" in the midst of this barrenness, telling of Christ Jesus, the Lord, who was to appear as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

The men, who were "sent . . . of the Pharisees," a group that was very strict about ceremonies, ordinances, and forms of all kinds, asked, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?" It is obvious from this question that they expected the Messiah to come baptizing. If John was not the Messiah, Elias, or the Prophet, what right did he have to baptize?

John answered, "I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Thus John told of Him who gave the authority to baptize. Again, he witnessed to the truth, directing attention to the Lord Jesus.

As "the voice crying in the wilderness," John said regarding Christ, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." Doubtless he meant that Christ was either in the midst of them or nearby in the land of Judea, rather than in the immediate vicinity, for we read in verse 29, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Indeed, Christ was there in spirit as He is everywhere, but the Jews did not recognize Him as Christ the Son of God.

Christ is still in our midst. He is pleading with men and women to turn to Him. He speaks through His ministers, His faithful teachers, all His born-again witnesses. But in spite of the gospel that is going forth day by day over the radio, in newspapers, books, and tracts, regardless of all that is being said about Him and for Him by His faithful servants, millions know Him not.

It is possible to be born again and yet to lack the fullness of the knowledge of Christ. We read of Him in Colossians 2:3, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." When one surrenders fully to the control of the living Christ, he becomes a participant of His luxuriant provision of wisdom and knowledge. Many of God's people have experienced only a modest realization of the power of Christ. Do you know His fullness? There is only one way to know Him in this manner: to

be willing to forsake all to follow Him; and then to yield to His absolute and complete control.

## THE LAMB OF GOD

*John 1:29-34*

A new day had dawned and once more John the Baptist took his place before the multitude to proclaim his message of repentance. Suddenly the long-anticipated event occurred. John lifted his eyes from the faces of his interested listeners and exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." What joy must have flooded John's heart. What excitement must have swept over the multitude of quiet listeners as suddenly every eye focused in one direction. At last, the Messiah had come.

Probably there is no statement in the entire Bible that could better describe the purpose and work of Christ to the Jews than "the Lamb of God." Their minds must have been flooded with Old Testament passages. Some recalled the incident of Abraham's climbing Mount Moriah with his only son, Isaac. The boy's question and the father's answer must have received new meaning in the light of John's declaration. "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:7-8).

Doubtless, the thinking of others reverted to that notable night of preparation for Israel's deliverance from Egypt: "Take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house" (Exodus 12:3). The lamb was to be slain and the blood sprinkled on the doorpost. And God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13).

Surely some in the audience thought of the temple service

where every morning and evening a lamb was placed on the altar for a burnt offering. Likewise, who could have overlooked Isaiah 53: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:6-7). The prophetic truth of all these passages and many more in the Old Testament were fulfilled in one Person, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

John described the Lamb as the One who "taketh away the sin of the world"! Christ did not come to be a wise teacher to instruct men and women how to overcome sin. He came to be God's eternal remedy for sin by providing an escape from it by willingly offering up His life to die on a cross! The innocent suffered for the guilty, bearing the sins of all who would be willing to believe on Him, Christ, "who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

When John declared Christ to be the One who "taketh away the sin of the world," he did not mean that Christ provided universal salvation. Not all are saved because Christ died on the cross. The way was made possible for all mankind to be saved, but not without personal responsibility; man must exercise personal faith in Christ to receive salvation. For this reason, man is without excuse. God has made the entire provision for sin. The shedding of the blood of the Lamb on the cross was the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose for the redemption of sinful man. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). When His blood poured forth from His body, this was the price, the only price, acceptable to God for man's sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Further we read in 1 John 2:2 that "He is the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world." Under the Old Testament dispensation, it was a lamb for a house. But under the new covenant, it is a Lamb for the world.

Christ is “the Lamb of God, which *taketh away* the sin of the world.” Not only did He die on the cross for sin, but for all those who know Him as Saviour and Lord He daily taketh away all present defilement. He cleanses, purges, and keeps us clean, so that we might be a holy people for God. Unclean thoughts, overt acts, unkind words defile and hinder the testimony of the believer. But as we go to the Lord and confess our sin, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The believer need never stay out of fellowship with God, for Christ “taketh away” all sin as we go to Him in humble repentance.

John emphasized the importance of Christ’s humanity: “This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for He was before me.” Christ is the Son of God, but He is also “a man.” He is different from other men, in that He existed from eternity.

We must not overlook the import of the words, “preferred before me.” Not only do they mean that Christ in His position as God’s Son was exalted above John, but even more, Christ had a priority claim on John. How favorably God’s servant reacted to this great truth. He realized that he was not his own, that he belonged to Christ. That is why he was out in the wilderness, willing to die, if need be, to prepare the way for Christ.

Doubtless every true believer would be willing to admit that Christ is higher than any one of us in position; but how few of us have realized Christ’s prior claim, and let Him lead us as He desires. As Saviour He is higher in position; but as Lord He is the possessor. Few of us have recognized Christ’s Lordship experientially. This is the place Christ desires and the place He should have in the life of every believer. In Luke 6:46 He asks, “Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

John says further, “And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.” From these words it seems that John the Baptist did not possess the certainty that Jesus was the Messiah until Christ’s

baptism. It was then that he heard the voice of God saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Following this experience John went forth to fulfill his divine mission assured that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah.

Many stories are told about Jesus performing miracles as a child. If this were the case, John the Baptist would have readily recognized Him as the Messiah earlier in life. Yet, though John had known Christ all those years, he did not recognize Him as the Messiah until later. Many in our day are guilty of this same oversight. They are *familiar* with spiritual truth, but they have never *experienced* the truth. In many cases, they have been reared in Christian homes, attended Bible-teaching churches, but have never had a personal encounter with Christ. One may know the way of salvation, yet be lost for failing to believe.

John described Christ's baptism saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." No one need argue with John as to Christ's authority, for he said, "I saw." He had visible evidence of the fact that Christ was the Son of God, the true Messiah. It is for this reason that he "bare record."

One who has had a real heart experience with God cannot keep quiet about Him. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). John tells us that he saw a vision of the Holy Spirit coming down from Heaven in the form of a dove. This was not a dove, but appeared to be like a dove. It should not be thought that the Holy Spirit had not dwelt with Christ prior to this time; but this was a visible sign given at the inception of Christ's earthly ministry.

Again John made the statement, "I knew Him not," revealing his lack of knowledge of Christ's identity until the time of our Lord's baptism. It was after this knowledge became perceptible to John that he was commissioned to go forth and baptize with water. But he made it clear that Christ's mission was far greater. John merely baptized with water; but when the

Messiah appeared, He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John came baptizing the body, but Jesus came baptizing the heart. John's was a baptism of preparation, while Christ's was a baptism unto salvation.

The baptism Jesus provided is experienced at the very moment one is born again. How tragic that many church people have been baptized with water but they have never known the baptism by the Holy Spirit. The penitent thief who hung on the cross by the side of Christ probably had never been near a church. It is quite reasonable to believe that he had never been touched by baptismal waters. But he was baptized by the Holy Spirit on the basis of his surrender and commitment to Christ and went to Heaven. Water baptism is not a requisite for salvation but the baptism by the Holy Spirit is.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the gift that awaits all who believe on Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). No one can become a child of God without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He may be sprinkled or immersed; he may be a Baptist, a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, or a member of any of the other denominations and still condemned to eternal hell, simply because he has not been born again. He has not submitted to the baptism of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John boldly acknowledged the One who had transformed his life: "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

To some, Jesus Christ is a great teacher, to others, a wise prophet, and to still others a profound philosopher. If this is all He is, they have missed the meaning set forth in God's revelation to man. God did not give us the Bible simply to provide a textbook for morality. "These [things] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

## THE FIRST DISCIPLES

*John 1:35-42*

A new day had dawned and John the Baptist had taken his place in the wilderness to minister to the multitudes. "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" John was not "a reed shaken with the wind," but a stalwart hero of the faith, who stood true, and firm for God.

As he saw the Lord Jesus walking among the multitudes, John said to the two disciples with whom he was standing, "Behold the Lamb of God!" One of the commendable characteristics of John the Baptist was that he had very little to say about himself. He exalted Christ constantly. The keynote of his message was Christ.

John's message was the same he had proclaimed on the previous day, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The first time nothing seemed to have happened. But look what followed his second announcement: "And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." Galatians 6:9 comes to mind in the light of this verse, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

It may be that you are a discouraged preacher or Sunday school teacher. You say, "I have been upholding Christ but I feel that my work is a failure." We cannot always see results. Sometimes that which appears to be a failure in the eyes of men is a remarkable success in the sight of God. On the other hand, what may seem to be success in the judgment of men can be a miserable failure in the estimation of God. Learn the lesson from John the Baptist! Do not give up!

There are three words of utmost significance in verse 37: "speak," "heard," and "followed." Here we have God's method for the saving of souls. As loyal saints, like John the Baptist,

*speak* for Christ, usually there will be some who will *hear* and then *follow* the Saviour. If God's people do not speak, how will the unsaved hear? Then, of course, they will not follow Christ.

Immediately after John's fearless declaration of Christ as "the Lamb of God," two of his disciples left him to follow Christ. "Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?" More literally this might be translated, "What can I do for you?" or "What do you want from Me?"

We might ask ourselves this question. As we look at our churches it is obvious that there are some who appear to have come to Christ for physical or material gain. While He was on the earth, many wanted to make Christ their king, not the King of their hearts or lives, but a temporal king who could give them deliverance from the Roman oppression. Of course the Lord Jesus knew the minds of these two would-be disciples, but He sought to draw them out, that they might understand clearly, in their own thinking, their purpose in following Him.

The reply given by the two men is expressive of their sincere interest. "They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest Thou?" Where did Jesus dwell? He tells us in Matthew 8:20, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Though He created all things and though He was the possessor of all things, yet while on the earth, He claimed no property for Himself. It is obvious that He must have had a temporary dwelling place. It may have been only a cave, or the home of an interested friend. But since leaving Nazareth He had become a wanderer, going here and there, teaching and healing in the Name of the Father.

The question asked by the two disciples suggests that they wanted a place where they could go to escape the multitudes so they might ask further questions and receive helpful counsel. They wanted additional knowledge of Christ in order to commit themselves more fully to Him.

"He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about

the tenth hour." The tenth hour would be four o'clock in the afternoon. Doubtless they had not concluded their visit by that time, so they continued on through the evening, remaining with Him throughout the night.

What a blessed experience that must have been. Can you not imagine the ecstasy that must have been theirs as they asked question after question in the presence of the Son of the living God? Surely they must have said afterward, as others did of our Lord, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

Notice that the first words our Lord spoke in this Gospel, other than His question, were "Come and see." John the Baptist had named Christ as the "Lamb of God," then the Lord Jesus said, "Come and see." The Lord Jesus is still inviting men and women the world over to "Come and see." Oh, what treasures, what blessedness awaits those who will follow His invitation, "Come and see."

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." We are not told the name of the other, but many seem to think that it was John, the writer of the Gospel. John was like Luke in that he never seemed to care whether or not his name was known. The important thing was that Christ be honored and exalted. In seven other places in the Gospel, John withheld his name. It is very probable that he did the same here.

Notice the first thing Andrew did after he became a follower of Christ: "He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." Indeed, this is the normal experience when one comes to know Christ. He is not content in keeping the glorious truth to himself; he must tell others. This was the experience of the psalmist as he described it in Psalm 71:15, "My mouth shall shew forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day." Andrew had spent the previous evening in the presence of the Son of God. His heart was filled and running over. He had to tell someone. The first one who came to his mind was his own brother.

When Andrew found his brother, he very simply gave witness

to his own experience with Christ: "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ," or more literally, "the anointed One." Andrew believed that Jesus was the Son of God anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Saviour of men. Thus with a loving heart he bore witness to his brother Simon.

Suppose Andrew had been a silent believer like many in our day who hold the truths of the Gospel so sacred that they never say anything to the unsaved about Christ? Andrew did what every true believer is supposed to do—he confessed Christ before men; and not only that, we read next that "he brought him to Jesus." Here was a man who came to Christ without ever hearing a sermon. All he knew was the warmhearted, Spirit-directed witness of a loving brother.

The moment the Lord Jesus saw the rugged fisherman He said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." Christ knew all about Simon in the same manner in which He knows about all of us. "The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Psalm 94:11). According to the Old Testament Scriptures, omniscience was to be one of the attributes of the Messiah. "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears" (Isaiah 11:2-3).

Knowing of Simon's sinful past, our Lord immediately gave him another name that would describe his new nature: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." *Cephas* is the Syriac for "stone." The Greek word is *petros*, from which we get "Peter" which also means "stone." More literally, it is a "piece of a stone or rock." Christ was the solid Rock, the Rock of Ages, but Simon became a piece of this Rock.

After Pentecost we see this truth fulfilled in the life of this faithful saint. His rocklike nature became evident wherever he went, as without flinching he stood for the Saviour. Recall the

incident at Jerusalem when the disciples were commanded not to speak in the Name of Christ. "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Later they were beaten for their faithful witness. But look at verses 41 and 42 of this same chapter: "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." What a mighty miracle had been wrought in Peter's life. The transforming power of Christ made him a rock for God.

### A GOOD MAN SAVED

*John 1:43-51*

Consider now the events of the fourth day in the record of the Apostle John. On the first day, John the Baptist was confronted by a delegation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem. On the second day, he made his notable declaration, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" On the third day, Andrew and his friend became followers of Christ, after which Andrew brought his brother, Simon, to the Lord.

On the fourth day Philip and Nathanael were won to Christ. "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me." While Andrew and his companion were led to follow Christ through the witness of John the Baptist, and Simon was brought to the Lord through the fervent testimony of his brother Andrew, Philip came to Christ without any human intervention whatsoever. God may or may not choose to use human instruments in drawing the lost to Christ. Though the Scriptures strongly emphasize the human element in soul winning, we see also that our Almighty and Sovereign God is not limited to the efforts of His people.

Though the method of Philip's conversion differed from that of the other three men, the basic belief was the same. Believers must guard against the error of trying to get others to duplicate their own personal experience in salvation. We read in Ephesians 4:5, there is "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." But at the same time, there is a diversity of operations by the Spirit. The important thing is not so much how you were saved, but are you saved? Some go forward to the altar in an evangelistic meeting. Others receive Christ in the quietness of their own homes. Some experience a remarkable transformation from lives of immorality and gross evil. Others take only a short step from the experience of being reared in a Christian home to sincere faith in the Son of God. The methods may differ but actual conversion and commitment must be the same — through faith in the Son of the Living God.

Wasn't it quite a risk for Philip to leave his business, his loved ones, and his hometown of Bethsaida to follow a Man he knew little about? Yes, in a sense it was. This is one reason why many do not follow Christ. They look to their possessions, their security, their loved ones, and refuse to look beyond these with the eye of faith and consider the Lamb of God. The important thing is that Philip must have realized, when he heard those words, "Follow Me," that God had said it and that was enough for him.

"Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter" (verse 44). Some have conjectured that after Andrew and Peter had been converted they urged the Lord Jesus to go and talk to their friend Philip. There appears to be a definite relationship between the conversion of Andrew and Peter and that of Philip.

Was Philip really converted? There is no question in my mind. "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (verse 45). Christianity is contagious. Andrew found Peter, and Philip found Nathanael.

Nathanael was not altogether responsive to Philip's en-

thusiasm, for he replied, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was an obscure town of questionable reputation. His hasty recollection of the Scriptures did not name Nazareth as the predicted place for the Messiah's birth.

Philip did not argue. He did not try to reason with Nathanael. He did the best thing anyone can do in witnessing for Christ—he said, "Come and see." First, he said, "We have found Him." Next, he invited Nathanael to "Come and see" for himself. People may resist arguments. They may spurn pleadings. But they can never completely ignore the clear-cut testimony of one's personal experience with Christ with a kindly invitation to believe and see for one's self.

Following Philip's invitation to "Come and see," Nathanael responded immediately. Soon they neared the Lord Jesus, and "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael must have been prayerfully and patiently awaiting the coming of the expected Messiah like the devout Simeon and Anna.

What Christ had to say about Nathanael suggests the words of Psalm 32:1-2: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." As a son of Abraham, Nathanael had lived up to all the light he had received. How surprised Nathanael must have been to find that Christ knew him. Thus he asked, "Whence knowest Thou me?" The Lord replied, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." He knew all about Nathanael, as He knows all about you and me.

Christ's words evoked a startling declaration from the lips of this devout Jew, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." Nathanael told the whole story here. As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus possesses all power in Heaven and earth to save and transform. Those who believe on Him are to submit themselves fully unto Him as His subjects.

The Lord Jesus had a further word for Nathanael. "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He saith unto

him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." There is always an open Heaven for those who claim Christ as Lord. We have the open Heaven in prayer. There is the open Heaven in the time of death: we go immediately to be with the Lord. But greatest of all, there will be the open Heaven when Christ comes back to rule and reign, "when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). This will be the glorious return of the Son of God to rule on the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. Nathanael had named Christ as the King of Israel. The Lord then told him explicitly when the King will establish His Kingdom.

Notice that verse 50 says "*thou* shalt see," but verse 51 says "*ye* shall see." Not only will Nathanael see the Lord, but "*ye* shall see" means that all believers will see Christ when He returns in glory. This is the believer's blessed hope. As we focus our attention on the earth-shaking events of our present civilization, it is easy to become discouraged and distraught. But God is not finished, "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37). Thus, believers in Christ, let us keep looking up, for "*ye* shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." But while we look up, let us faithfully witness, giving forth the evidence of the indwelling Christ through transformed lives.

## 2

### THE FIRST MIRACLE

*John 2:1-11*

Throughout his Gospel, John presents seven signs or miracles as evidence of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. The first was performed at a wedding feast where water was changed to wine. Perhaps you will recall that the first miracle Moses performed had to do with the changing of water, but in his miracle water was changed to blood, typical of the law which could produce only death. But the changing of water to wine evidences the message of grace through Christ and His power to produce life. Thus we see the great truth of new life through Christ in our Lord's miracle.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there." Apparently this is the third day following the conversion of Philip and Nathanael. Cana was Nathanael's hometown. Whether or not Nathanael was related to the bride or bridegroom or merely a friend, we can only conjecture. Evidently Mary, the mother of our Lord, was a friend of the family, probably participating in the preparations for the wedding. By virtue of the fact that Mary had some part in the wedding feast, "both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage." As far as we know, there were five disciples at this time: Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael.

Wedding feasts in the time of our Lord usually lasted several days, and were attended by scores of guests. Often those who were not extremely rich found their supplies running low toward the close of the feast. Perhaps this was the case here, for they ran out of wine. But Mary felt that she had the answer: "And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine."

Doubtless, the words, "They have no wine," were spoken with heartfelt expectancy. Not only did Mary desire to help her friends in their emergency, but for years she anticipated the occasion when Christ might reveal His identity as God's only Son who should die for the sins of the world. She had never forgotten the words spoken by the angel and the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Christ. She knew that He was the Messiah and that one day He would make Himself known to all. For thirty years Mary had waited for the proper time. Now she thought it had arrived. Thus, it would seem that her words, "They have no wine," really meant, "Son, perform a miracle. Reveal Yourself. Show them who You are." Christ's reply gives this meaning to her request. It is obvious that Mary had never seen our Lord perform a miracle, but she knew He could and knew He would. Thus her humble appeal.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Some have felt that our Lord's reply reveals disrespect. It was not that at all. Literally, it was, "Mother, what is there in common to Me and thee? My thoughts are one thing and yours are another." We must realize that Mary was not infallible, but Jesus was. Mary was not free from sin, but Jesus was.

In Mary's request, there was a sense of human glory and pride in her Son. She was wholly sincere in what she asked, but the Lord Jesus informed her that this was not according to the divine Plan. It was not time for Him to reveal Himself. The hour did come later, as we are told in John 12:23, when certain Greeks came, desiring to see Jesus: "And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." Then in the next verse He told of His coming death on the cross, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

Christ's hour had to do with His death, burial, and resurrection. It was not time for this yet. So He said to Mary, "Mine hour is not yet come." She was not disturbed. She did not question His answer, but simply said to the servants, "Whatsoever

He saith unto you, do it." Here we see Mary's subservience to her Son. She submitted to Him willingly because she knew Him to be the Son of God.

Glancing off to the side, our Lord saw six stone waterpots, used for ceremonial purification purposes according to the requirements of the Jews. Each was about the size of an ordinary barrel. Christ requested that the servants "Fill the waterpots with water," and "they filled them up to the brim." Then the Lord Jesus said, "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it." The governor of the feast was the one who presided at such an affair, a common practice among the Greeks and Romans.

Consider the perfect obedience of these servants. There was a need for wine, and Christ told them to fill the waterpots with water. Further, He told them to take some of it to the one presiding at the feast. There was plenty of water; it was wine they needed. But there is not the slightest suggestion that they complained or remonstrated. "They filled them up to the brim"; and when requested to carry the water to the governor of the feast, "they bare it."

We should note also that Jesus did not touch the waterpots nor the water. He did not pray to the Father openly for a miracle; He simply willed the change. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of such a miracle being duplicated by any prophet or apostle. The reason, of course, was that Jesus was the Son of God.

Sometimes the Lord's people become downcast and discouraged. Our difficulties and problems seem more than we can bear. We cry aloud, "Oh, what shall I do?" Take heart, child of God! The same One who centuries ago willed that this water be changed to wine can also will that your frustrating circumstances be changed to pleasing ones. Wine in Scripture usually suggests joy. The waterpots were filled with water, but Jesus changed the water to wine. At this moment your life may be filled with misery, but the Lord Jesus can change it to joy. God says in Psalm 30:5, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." A miracle may be the only possible

way joy can come to you. Well, rest assured, God is still performing miracles. The same Christ who stood in the midst of the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee stands in your presence today. He is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). Do not be discouraged! Look to the Lord; He will not fail you. Trust Him! He will fill your heart with joy.

Notice what the governor of the feast said after he tasted the wine. “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.” He testifies that the best was kept to the last. That is the way it is when one becomes a Christian — the best is yet to come. It is wonderful to have the presence of the Lord with us each day, but on this earth life is not altogether perfect. We have many sorrows to bear, with much misery and pain. These are the days of the cross. But the crown and the throne are yet to come. “And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:9). There is another marriage feast yet to come, after our Lord returns. The best is yet to come.

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.” The glory of His mighty power was now known. Soon the word would spread and many would believe on Christ. The statement, “His disciples believed on Him,” does not mean that they were converted after seeing this miracle; they had already been converted; but the word “believe” as used here means that they surrendered themselves to His control. After seeing this manifestation of His power, they gave themselves to Him wholeheartedly. How important that every believer do the same, that we lay ourselves at Jesus’ feet completely, reserving nothing for self.

## THE TEMPLE CLEANSED

*John 2:12-22*

From the marriage at Cana, we see our Lord going down to Capernaum accompanied by His mother, various relatives, and His small band of disciples. We are not to understand that Mary traveled with Jesus wherever He went, for she is only mentioned on several occasions. As was the case at the marriage in Cana, so here there is no mention of Joseph. It is believed that he had died by this time.

Capernaum became our Lord's residence in Galilee during His ministry, though He was rarely there. When there, He performed numerous miracles and gave the people every opportunity to believe on Him and follow Him. But the hearts of the people were hardened by unbelief. Thus Christ denounced Capernaum saying, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell" (Matthew 11:23). This prophecy was fulfilled completely. For many centuries afterward, no one even knew where Capernaum had existed. Several years ago it was discovered in an excavation. The people of Capernaum were so privileged, and yet they missed God's best for their lives.

From Capernaum Christ went to Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish passover. In the capital city He "found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting." This reveals how degenerate the priesthood had become and how far the religious leaders had deviated from the true worship of God. The priests were not directly involved in selling animals, but they were likely sharing in the profits.

The animals offered for sale were used by those who came from distant places for the sacrifices during passover. The merchandising was not carried on in the Temple proper but rather in the courtyards that surrounded it. Even so, this was known as a part of the Temple and as such it was considered holy

ground. When the Lord Jesus arrived and saw this situation, He was moved with righteous indignation. "And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise." Evidently the small cords, used to tie up the animals, were lying about. Binding them together into a whip, Christ overturned the tables, and drove the animals and the money changers out of the temple courtyard.

In the days of our Lord the Temple was at Jerusalem, but where is the temple today? "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) Where is the temple? Wherever you find a born-again believer. Your body is the temple. You are the dwelling place of God. Has your temple become "an house of merchandise," whereby you are living for yourself, earning money for your own interest rather than the work of God? Must the Lord Jesus come upon you in judgment as He came upon the priests of old? Oh, to you our Master is saying, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

Our Lord's action had a tremendous effect upon those who observed. First of all, the disciples recognized immediately that this was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy found in Psalm 69. Further, the Jews who had witnessed the purge asked, "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" This was a request for Christ to produce His credentials. Thus, they asked for a sign or a miracle to prove His prerogative for such action. Our Lord's reply was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This caused more consternation than ever. "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear

it up in three days?" It had taken much more than forty-six years to build the Temple, but it is believed that reference was being made to the forty-six years under the reign of Herod when it was being repaired. This misstatement suggests they were so angry with Christ that they could not talk correctly.

The Lord Jesus in speaking of the destruction of the Temple, of course had in mind His crucifixion. "He spake of the temple of His body." These blinded Jews had no understanding whatsoever about this. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Jews wanted a sign. Christ did not satisfy their demands immediately, but He gave a prophecy of the cross and then of His resurrection, as if to say, "I will not give you a sign now, but eventually you will have a sign." That sign was the greatest miracle of all. Even Christ's disciples did not comprehend that He was speaking about His death and resurrection, for John adds, "When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." Belief as expressed here was not for salvation, they are already converted, but they were more deeply established and entrenched in the faith as they linked the prophecy with the fulfillment.

If these disciples were made strong in the faith by the few fragments they had within their possession, consider the hundreds of prophecies and fulfillments which we possess in both the Old and New Testaments. The Jews requested a sign. You and I possess hundreds of signs Christ has given as to His existence, His authority, and His life. What men and women of faith we should be. Faith is not without knowledge. God has given us the facts, but we are of such little faith, so slow to believe, we doubt God for our health, we doubt Him for financial provision, we doubt Him for every problem imaginable. How we need to pray as did the distraught father who cried out, "Help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

# 3

## A NIGHTTIME VISITOR

*John 2:23—3:8*

“When He was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men.” It appears that the “many” spoken of here who believed in Christ’s name, believed not because He was the Son of God, but because of His ability to perform miracles. For this reason “Jesus did not commit Himself unto them.” He knew that in many cases their belief was not genuine and that they were not true followers. The word “commit” is really the word “believe.” Thus we might read it this way, “Because they did not believe in Him, He did not believe in them.” How did our Lord know they did not believe? Because He was God. John tells us that He “needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man.” Because of His divinity He knew the deceitfulness of their minds and hearts.

Chapter 3 really belongs to the last three verses of chapter 2. In the original there is a little word that was dropped in translation, “But.” “But there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” “But” is used in contrast here, in comparing Nicodemus with those who merely believed because Jesus performed miracles. Though many were not sincere, here was a man who was. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, “a ruler of the Jews.” Christ drew His followers from all walks of life. Salvation is for the rich as well as the poor, the educated as well as the uneducated. It is for all.

Nicodemus was an ecclesiastical leader, recognized as an outstanding religious teacher. “The same came to Jesus by

night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him." For centuries Nicodemus has been criticized by Christian workers for coming to Jesus as a nighttime visitor, implying that he was a coward, afraid to jeopardize his high position in the synagogue. Maybe this is true, but were not most of us cowards before we were saved? Few unregenerate men are interested in taking a stand for Christ. It matters not when lost souls come to Christ, whether by day or night, just so they come.

Nicodemus addressed Christ as "Rabbi." This was a name of dignity among the Jews, meaning "teacher" or "master." The earnest inquirer accepted Christ's miracles as credentials to distinguish the Lord Jesus from all others, stating that "no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him." Nicodemus' faith went beyond the miracles, for he recognized two things in Christ: He came from God, and God was with Him. The faith exercised by Nicodemus was based upon a sincere belief in Christ, not merely on what He did. This is saving faith.

It is obvious that Nicodemus had followed Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry. He may even have been in the wilderness listening to John the Baptist preach. Possibly he followed Christ to Cana, then to Capernaum, and finally on down to Jerusalem, though we do not know this.

The Lord Jesus answered and said unto Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "A man," as used here, means anyone or everyone without exception. The new birth is a requisite for any who would enter the kingdom of God.

The new birth of which Jesus speaks does not mean turning over a new leaf. It is not an effort to do better. It is not water baptism. It is a transformation of character, wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is a miracle of God.

Various terms are used throughout the New Testament to describe this experience. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, one born again is seen as a "new creature." In Ephesians 2:1, he is "quicken-

ed." In Colossians 3:9-10, the experience is described as putting "off the old man" and putting "on the new." In 1 Peter 2:9, it is being "called out of darkness into light."

As God's remedy for sin, the new birth goes to the very root of evil—the corrupt heart. God says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Through the new birth one receives new aspirations and desires, power to overcome temptation and sin. In short, this is the greatest of all miracles performed in humans.

Our Lord made it clear to Nicodemus that without the new birth it would be impossible to see the kingdom of God. To enjoy the privileges of Judaism, one needed to be born of the seed of Abraham. But to become a member of the kingdom of God, one needs to be born of God Himself. This can be accomplished only by the spiritual rebirth which Jesus described in John 3.

Many were looking for Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom. Evidently Nicodemus had recognized the possibility of this. Upon hearing about being born again, he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Nicodemus overlooked the fact that the new birth is a spiritual rather than a physical experience. At His first advent, Jesus did not come to set up an earthly kingdom; He came to call sinful men and women into a spiritual kingdom. At first this would be small and weak, but at His return it will be great and strong.

Apparently Nicodemus was an old man when he came to Jesus, for he asked, "How can a man be born when he is *old*?" No one is too old to be born again. There are no age barriers. Little children may come, the middle aged, the elderly, all are invited to become the subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom by placing faith in Him.

Our Lord further explained the new birth: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Water" as used here cannot mean baptism, as some have taught, for such teaching is not substantiated by

Scripture. It seems clear that by "water" He meant the Word of God. In Psalm 119:9 we read, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word." Spiritual cleansing is not by water but by the Word of God. The Lord Jesus declared in John 15:3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Further we read in Ephesians 5:25-26, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

Repeatedly in the Scriptures we find the Word of God as the cleansing element in salvation. It is the Word that penetrates the heart and mind, bringing conviction for sin that prompts us to turn helplessly to God. The heart is made ready by the Word of God for the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, apart from God's Word and the transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit, one "cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

The Lord Jesus also stressed the fact that "Except a man be born again" he can neither "see" nor "enter" the kingdom of God. One may become a child of God without money, without an education, without culture. But he can never become a child of God without the new birth.

Our Lord taught also that it is impossible to be born again apart from a work of God in the heart. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Since the Lord Jesus is speaking of a spiritual kingdom, flesh can never have a part in this kingdom; there must be a spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus had spoken of entering the second time into his mother's womb and being born. Even if this were possible, it would be of no value regarding Christ's kingdom, which would still be of the flesh. If a child of human parents were born a hundred times in the flesh, he would be nothing more than flesh. David declared in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Because the flesh is sinful, those who are controlled by the flesh cannot please God, for God hates all sin. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). That is why all

humans must be born again, for in the new birth sins are forgiven and new life is granted.

The only One who ever possessed perfect flesh was Jesus Christ. He was created in the likeness of sinful flesh. In other words, He looked like everyone else, but He was not sinful. He was perfectly pure and holy. It is He who died for sinful flesh, that we might become identified with Him, members of His kingdom, born again, cleansed from all sin, to be eternally saved.

Our Lord perceived Nicodemus' mental struggle. He was in earnest, desiring to know the truth. Like many, he wanted to figure it all out before believing. Our Lord said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." One would be foolish not to believe in the wind simply because he could not see it or fully comprehend its mighty power. This is no reason to overlook its evidence. So it is with the spiritual rebirth. Granted, there are mysteries involved. It would be impossible to give a clear-cut rationalization of it. Such would rule out faith. And the Bible declares, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). The operations of the Holy Spirit in transforming a sinful man or woman cannot be fully understood, for the Holy Spirit is Sovereign God and incomprehensible in His ways. Thus, let us not stumble because of the limitations of our finite minds. By faith, let us believe the truth as presented in God's Holy Word, for Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

No one has seen the wind, but all of us have seen its effects, the devastation caused by severe wind storms. This mighty power has lowered trees, razed homes, and destroyed lives. We have not seen the wind, but we have seen what the wind has done. So one cannot see the quiet working of the Holy Spirit, but all who are truly saved will testify to the fact that its effects are visible. We have seen lives snatched from alcoholism, prostitution, and thievery, being transformed into peaceful, law-abiding citizens with a holy love for God and man. How do you

account for this? There is only one answer: the new birth, the miracle of the Holy Spirit. When one repents and believes he is made into a new creation by the power of God.

### "HOW CAN IT BE?"

*John 3:9-15*

After our Lord told Nicodemus about the new birth, "Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be?"

Christ did not answer Nicodemus directly, but rebuked him for his spiritual incompetency. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" "A master" could be read "*the* master." Nicodemus was not merely a teacher of the Jews, he was a well-known teacher of high rank and position, respected and admired by his people. A man in such a position should have a masterful grasp of spiritual truth. He should have been familiar with the Scripture passages telling of new life through the Messiah.

The next verse indicates that up until this time Nicodemus still had doubts in his heart. He was weighing the evidence though he was not a believer. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." Nicodemus was assured that all the Lord Jesus had spoken was truth. Christ was not offering theories or hypotheses that had not yet been tried. He said, "We do know," and further, "We have seen." But in spite of this, Jesus had to say of Nicodemus, "Ye receive not our witness." Here was the Son of God, speaking the truth of God, but it was rejected and spurned.

Our Lord then made a comparison between earthly and heavenly things. The new birth is distinctly "earthly" in the sense that it is God's means for men on earth to enter into

"heavenly things." Christ had just given His discourse on the new birth, then He said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" This is not to say that He would not tell Nicodemus of heavenly things, for He proceeded to tell him of the plan of redemption to be revealed in the cross, God's eternal love for fallen men, the purpose for Christ's coming into the world, and other heavenly truths that were to be made available to all through faith in Christ.

"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Nicodemus was being told that the One to whom he was speaking was the eternal Son of God, the only Rightful One to ascend into the presence of the Father.

Someone may ask, "Well, what about Enoch? What about Elijah?" Actually they ascended into a place of rest, reserved for those who love God, but they did not ascend into the presence of the Father, as Christ did when He ascended. He is in Heaven at this moment, seated at the right hand of God the Father, the position of authority and power. There our Saviour will remain until the appointed time of His return.

Doubtless Nicodemus, like hundreds of the Jews, thought that when the Messiah came it would be in a blaze of glory to set up His temporal and material kingdom. The Lord Jesus informed Nicodemus that this would not be the case, but rather He would be crucified on the cross. He taught further that this was God's plan for man's deliverance from his spiritual incapacity, even as the brazen serpent was Israel's deliverance from the physical: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

There is a very definite relationship between the serpent in the wilderness and the lifting up of the Son of man. As the children of Israel were dying from their snake bites, so all of humanity is dying from the curse of sin. But as the serpent of brass was lifted up by an act of God's grace to provide a miraculous deliverance, so Christ was to be lifted up on the cross to provide a way of escape from sin. This escape is not on-

ly for some, but for all who will believe on Christ. Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32). The cross provided the means for all to be saved. The Israelites had to look to the serpent to be saved.

You will recall, however, that as the children of Israel looked to the brazen serpent, some had doubts. Some looked with skepticism, thinking, "What good is that to deliver me from death?" Those with this thought were not saved. It was necessary to look by faith. So it is in trusting Christ for salvation. Some may look at Him and admire Him as a great teacher or even a fearless martyr. But that does not save. We must see Him as the Sin-bearer, the One who died for all. "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). If one looks to Christ with a sincere, earnest, heart belief, he will not perish "but have eternal life."

To "perish" means to be cast into outer darkness, to forever miss Heaven, and to be eternally plagued by the torments of hell. Spiritual death is more than annihilation; it is eternity without God in the suffering and pangs of hell-fire. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). Some have sought to tone this down; others have tried to explain it away. But still it stands as the authoritative Word of God.

Why should anyone suffer such torment when he might enjoy the bliss of life eternal in the presence of Christ? God says in Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Good intentions are not sufficient, one must act before it is too late.

I was speaking at a well-known Bible conference in the South. Working at this conference was a very active Christian businessman I had known for years. After the morning message of my last day, word came that this friend had gone to be with the Lord very suddenly. He appeared to be in perfect health when I talked to him the day before. But how quickly

the angel of death ushered him away. This man knew the Lord. But many do not.

Thank God that the Lord Jesus was lifted up on the cross to die for our sins, “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

## EVERLASTING LIFE

*John 3:16-21*

Martin Luther termed John 3:16 “the Bible in miniature.” Others have called it “the gospel in a nutshell.” Almost every child memorizes it in Sunday school: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Probably there are no words in the Bible more important than the opening words of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world.” Oh, the mercy of our loving Heavenly Father, that He should be concerned about sinful humanity. His very nature is love. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). There is no end to which His love cannot go, for He “so loved the world.”

God’s love embraces all of fallen humanity, all who are identified in Adam’s transgression. When Christ died on the cross, He died for all—“that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Christ’s death was proof of the Father’s love. God not only stated His love, He proved it in “that He gave His only begotten Son.” Christ was the Father’s sacrifice in providing redemption for all. Isaiah the prophet declared that “the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

God’s love does not exclude human responsibility. The provision has been made for every human born into the world, but each human must believe to be saved: “that whosoever believ-

eth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God's love for the world does not mean universal salvation for all.

One of the heavenly truths Jesus revealed to Nicodemus was that in order to be saved one must believe of his own volition. What is it to believe? It is to recognize Christ as one's Sin-bearer, and at the same time to submit to His control. The moment one believes, God assures the believer that he will "not perish, but have everlasting life." All who refuse to believe on Christ in this life will perish. That is, they will spend eternity in hell. Those who believe will spend eternity in the presence of Christ.

Christ also revealed that He did not come to bring judgment upon the world. When He returns at His Second Advent, His mission will be one primarily of judgment. But in His First Advent He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God the Father longs for every person in the entire world to come to Christ for salvation. Christ came into the world—"that the world through Him might be saved."

If this phrase were lifted from its context, it might provide weight for the false teaching of universal salvation. But the entire passage stresses the personal responsibility of each one who would be saved: "whosoever believeth."

Jesus stressed that all who trust in Christ are immediately delivered from the guilt of sin. They are pardoned and justified. That is, they are declared righteous in the sight of God: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." This is the third time that our Lord spoke of believing on Himself. Repetition in the Bible is vitally important. Do not overlook this essential truth that belief in Christ is the basic requisite for salvation.

But notice the other side of this truth: "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Eternal condemnation is not based upon how one lives, but upon what he believes. Whoever believes on Christ escapes condemnation. Those who refuse to believe are eternally condemned.

This condemnation does not come upon one at the end of the physical life, nor is one free from condemnation until he

decides whether or not he desires to believe on Christ; he is under the condemnation of God until he believes. Because of Adam's transgression, and because this sin has infected all humans born into the world, all humans are naturally condemned. The only escape from condemnation is to believe on Christ, as God has stated in His Word.

The next verse provides insight into the heart of man: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The eternal Son of God entered the world. Not only that, He went to the cross to die for everyone in the world. We might think that because of this supreme sacrifice, everyone would grasp the opportunity to believe on Him and follow Him. But just the opposite is true. Rather than choose Christ and holiness, millions have continued to reject Him and follow the paths of wickedness. Why? God says, "Their deeds were evil." Jeremiah was correct when he said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Because we possess sinful natures, we desire sin. Only after a miracle of God is performed in the soul will one be concerned about righteousness. Man left to himself loves darkness rather than light. Even the best of men are given to sinful thoughts and wicked deeds. This is why Nicodemus needed to be born again, why every human of every age needs to be born again.

Verses 20 and 21 provide a contrast between two men, the unconverted and the converted: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

Sin and Christ are irreconcilable. Unconverted men have no sincere love for Christ. There are many who are not really against Christ, who acknowledge Him as the Son of God and respect Him as the Saviour, but have never committed themselves to Him because they love their sin more than they love Him. They have not come to Him and believed on Him,

thus down deep in their hearts they despise Him. If they did not, they would love Him.

The Lord Jesus tells us the reason that many unconverted people do not come to Him for salvation is that they fear their deeds will be reproved. How foolish! For sooner or later they must appear before the judgment of God. How much better to let Christ deal with one's evil now than to expose it later and then hear His words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). One can never find peace by hiding his sins. "The soul that sinneth, it shall [surely] die" (Ezekiel 18:20). The one who persists in sin will be separated from God eternally.

Now look at the other man. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." The man who comes to Christ will not be ashamed of his deeds. Oh, he will be ashamed of all that transpired before his conversion. But after he is born again, he is energized by the power of God to do those things that please and honor the Name of God. His life will be a witness to the saving power of Christ, for all that he does is "wrought in God." Paul declared in Acts 24:16, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." The believer will be a shining light to reveal the True Light. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). The indwelling Holy Spirit enables the believer to "walk in the light, as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

Which of these two men are you? Do you hate the light or love the light? If there is any doubt, turn to Christ. He is God's Son, the only way of salvation.

**LORD OF ALL***John 3:22-36*

Having completed His conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord left the capital city of Jerusalem to go out into the rural areas, where He began His public ministry of teaching and preaching. "After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea, and there He tarried with them, and baptized." Christ did not do the actual baptizing but left this phase of His ministry to His disciples: "Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples" (John 4:2). That is, His disciples did the baptizing. Obviously this was not a baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but rather a baptism in the name of Jesus the Messiah, administered to those who followed Him. It would seem that after Jesus appeared on the scene, even John the Baptist, in his baptism of repentance, began baptizing in the name of Christ.

"John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized." Baptism being performed by our Lord's disciples and John the Baptist was not the most important part of their ministry. Baptism presupposed belief. Outward ceremonies cannot cleanse from inward wickedness. The same is true in our day. Baptism is not a substitute for conversion. It should follow conversion but never precede it.

John the Baptist "was not yet cast into prison." Recall the incidents surrounding John's arrest: Herod had regard for John's faithful ministry, but John could not overlook Herod's sinfulness, living in adultery with Herodias, his own brother's wife. Everyone seemed to be afraid of Herod; but when the opportunity came, John the Baptist spoke out boldly to his face, declaring, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." Herod's anger was aroused and he had John arrested. Because of the satanic desire of Herodias, John the Baptist was martyred.

How we need men and women like John the Baptist who will unflinchingly stand for God. Repeatedly, the Lord pleads with us in the Word to get on one side or the other, but not to stay in the middle. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16). Does "lukewarm" describe your Christian experience? If so, once and for all declare with Thomas of old, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Let the Lord Jesus become the Master of your life.

As John the Baptist fulfilled his ministry, a problem developed. "There arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him."

The question about "purifying" seemed to be over whose baptism was more effective, John's or Christ's. This created a disturbing difficulty in the hearts of John's disciples. The disciples of John were jealous because Christ was getting more followers than John. Even some of John's most faithful followers were leaving him to be with Christ.

The same danger confronts many Christian workers in our day—the sin of jealousy. One would not expect believers proclaiming the same Christ to be jealous of each other, but often they are. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Proverbs 27:4) All of us have experienced the horrible effects resultant from anger, but God tells us that envy is even worse. I believe it is one of the most destructive sins within the church today. At the same time, it is one of the evils most of us would say the least about. We know we are guilty but we refuse to claim victory through Christ.

In reply to the complaint of the disciples, John the Baptist was his usual humble self. He answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." He had a specific call from God. He was doing only what God called him to do: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the

Christ, but that I am sent before Him." Christ would certainly have more followers than John, for Christ was the Messiah. John was simply the messenger telling people about Christ.

John the Baptist illustrated this fact : "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." A Jewish bridegroom had certain friends who represented him to the bride before the marriage, seeking to remove all obstacles and hasten the possibility of marriage. This was John's particular calling. The Bridegroom is Christ and the bride is the body of believers in Christ. John rejoiced to know that God's perfect plan was being fulfilled in that men and women were flocking to Christ Jesus.

John the Baptist summarized his feeling about Christ's popularity with his notable words, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Should this not be the desire of every true believer? How important that our loved ones and friends see the Lord Jesus within us. If we are proud and haughty, this is impossible. But if we are yielded to our Lord's control, He will become preeminent. How we need to heed Peter's admonition, "Be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5). Only as we are filled with Christ can we be empty of self.

John continued to speak of the superiority of Christ over frail, sinful humans: "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He that cometh from heaven is above all." If we do not abase self, Christ will not be exalted.

John also exalted Christ by referring to the message He proclaimed. "And what He hath seen and heard, that He testifieth." Here Christ is contrasted to ministers of the gospel who merely testify to that which they are taught by the Holy Spirit. Christ, on the other hand, had seen and heard of what He testified. It would seem that everyone would believe, but John declared, "and no man receiveth His testimony." The multitudes did not receive Christ's testimony. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). But "He

that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." All who believe on Christ and receive Him as Saviour and Lord, acknowledge that what God has said about His Son is true. "For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." All that He spoke was infallible. When Christ spoke, He spoke in the Spirit, with no limits.

"God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him," John tells us. Christ was one with the Spirit and the Father. The Trinity always spoke and worked in perfect harmony. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." Thus John makes it clear that it is the purpose of God that men turn to Christ and believe on Him, that John is merely a voice calling the unconverted to repentance in Christ.

In the last verse of the chapter John the Baptist gives his final testimony for the Lord Jesus: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." With such a verse no one need miss the point. How does one get everlasting life? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Some think that believing is not enough, they feel they must do something in addition. But the Bible makes it clear that believing is all that one can do.

## 4

### JESUS AT THE WELL

*John 4:1-6*

There were several erroneous reports being advanced about Christ. One had to do with baptism. "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples,) He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee." How quickly rumors spread, hindering our Lord's work.

It is obvious that the Lord Jesus had to leave Judea at this time because of the false report. The Pharisees were becoming incensed. They had respect for John the Baptist but they had many questions about Jesus of Nazareth. It appeared that Jesus was the more popular of the two. The Pharisees were disturbed by this.

Jesus "left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And He must needs go through Samaria." Christ's popularity among the multitudes was growing rapidly. As the result, trouble was brewing among the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who wished to curtail Christ's future ministry. This may be one reason why Jesus left Judea to go north to Galilee. He was not being cowardly, for the hour had not yet come for Him to go to the cross to die for the sins of the world. It is not wrong to attempt to escape the evil intents of wicked men. There is no special honor in martyrdom if there is any way to avoid it.

There was another reason why our Lord left Judea, and "must" go through Samaria, though this was not the usual route taken by the Jews. A hasty look at the map of Palestine

might suggest that there was no alternative. Judea was located in the south, Galilee in the north, and Samaria in between. But remember, the Jews despised the Samaritans and would have nothing whatsoever to do with them. Thus they frequently crossed the Jordan, traveled up through Perea, and then entered Galilee. But Jesus "must needs go through Samaria" because there was a soul who needed help. While most Jews in their travels north would have taken the longest way to escape Samaria, the Lord Jesus took the shortest route possible to reach a woman who was spiritually destitute.

"Then cometh He to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour." The sixth hour could have meant either twelve o'clock noon or six o'clock in the evening, according to the Hebrew reckoning of time or the Roman. It would seem that it was at the noon hour that our Lord arrived at the well.

It is well to note that Christ was "wearied with His journey." The importance of our Lord's humanity is often overlooked. We like to think of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But the Word was not only God, the Word was man, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This flesh was the same flesh you and I possess, with one exception—He was without sin. When Jesus arrived in Samaria He was weary in His flesh.

Do you ever get weary? Do you ever become tired and sometimes almost reach the breaking point? The Lord Jesus knows all about that. The eternal Son of God became weary when He was on this earth. In fact, we read in Hebrews 4:15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Sometimes our cup is filled to the brim with sorrow and grief. There is

One who understands all about sorrow because He has been through it. Our part is to trust Him, to believe Him fully for all things. How many of us are willing to trust Him in the sunshine hours but we fail to trust Him when the storm clouds gather above us, when the way becomes confusing and we know not which direction to go.

Because the Lord Jesus was a man on this earth, facing all the sorrows of life as you and I know them, He can fully understand your heartache. At the same time, He can provide a way of deliverance. God will not fail you. "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Joshua 23:14).

Dr. W. S. Martin hesitated to leave his very sick wife to fulfill a preaching engagement. The reassuring counsel of his small son came as a word from the Lord, "Don't worry, Daddy, God will take care of Mother while you are gone." So Dr. Martin preached that night, and hearts sought and found the Lord. Rejoicing, he hurried home to find Mrs. Martin much improved. During his absence she had written the words to the well-known gospel song,

Be not dismayed whate'er betide,  
God will take care of you;  
Beneath His wings of love abide,  
God will take care of you.

Yes, God will always take care of you, if you trust Him to do it. Remember, He knows your need, and because He knows, He will undertake.

## THE LIVING WATER

*John 4:7-15*

In chapter 3 the Lord Jesus was confronted with a learned, religious man. In chapter 4 He deals with a degraded, immoral woman. How true it is that our "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). As Jesus was seated on the well, "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water." Water was scarce in the hot climates of the East, so it was the common procedure to make frequent trips to the well. Usually, the task fell upon the women. The appearance of the Samaritan woman at the well at this particular time was not a mere happenstance. Unknown to her, this was a divine appointment. Not waiting for her to speak, our Lord made a request, "Give Me to drink." Of course, the Lord Jesus knew all about this woman's wicked past. He did not begin by reproving or rebuking her, but by making a simple request.

As we see throughout the Gospels, the Lord Jesus was the Master Personal Worker. Constantly He spoke of the heavenly in terms of the earthly, that His hearers might understand. Also, we find Him adhering to one direct line of thought. Being beside a well, it seems only natural that He should speak about the Water of Life. Thus He began with the word "drink." In His own inimitable way, He communicated the truth in a manner in which it could be received into the heart.

The Apostle John explains the absence of Christ's disciples at this time: "For His disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat." The word "meat" as used here, and in sixteen other places in the New Testament, means "food." Though our Lord was the Creator of the earth which produced the food for man to eat, and though He miraculously provided bread and fish for thousands out on the desert, He rarely performed a miracle for Himself. Though He could have provided for Himself and the

disciples as God had done for Elijah, He chose that they should buy food like anyone else.

Notice the Samaritan woman's reply to Christ's plea for water. "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." That a Jew would make such a request of a Samaritan was an unheard of thing, for the Jews despised the Samaritans.

As the Master Personal Worker, our Lord never permitted Himself to become engrossed in needless discussions. Thus, ignoring the woman's question, He answered her, "If thou knewst the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."

The bewildered woman replied, "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast Thou that living water?" Like Nicodemus, this woman could not perceive spiritual truth. She interpreted our Lord's words in the light of the physical. She realized that the well was seventy-five or eighty feet deep and that Jesus had no rope and no container of any kind, thus her question. But she had a further question, "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

Genesis 32 tells of Jacob wrestling with the mysterious stranger at Peniel, and crying, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). Further Jacob declared, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." On that memorable night not only was Jacob's thigh thrown out of joint, but his stubborn will was forever broken. Who wrestled with Jacob? Who was it that was greater than he? None other than the Son of God.

Christ could have told the woman of Samaria this story and identified Himself, but again He completely ignored her reasoning as graciously He presented the truth: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but

the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Now the mystery seems to become understandable. Christ was speaking about two different kinds of water, "this water" and "the water that I shall give him." The woman realized suddenly that the water of which Jesus was speaking about was unknown to her. Doubtless she had trudged to Jacob's well many, many times, but a spring of water bubbling up with a fresh supply moment by moment, that would never run dry, was very different from Jacob's well.

The Samaritan woman responded to Christ's invitation: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." She thought by receiving the Water of Life there would be no need of coming to Jacob's well again. The truth was not clear to her as yet. If, however, one is willing to go this far, the Lord will respond and give the Water of Life.

### THE JOYFUL REALIZATION

*John 4:16-30*

Our Lord proceeded to bring the Samaritan woman to a necessary realization of her spiritual need, saying, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly."

Nothing more is said about the Living Water. Christ laid aside the figurative to speak about the practical. He had told the woman about the solution for her need; He continued by drawing her to the place where she would recognize her need. The gospel is medicine for the soul; but until one realizes that the soul is sick, he will not take the medicine. There must be conviction of sin if there is to be the reception of the truth.

"I have no husband" was a very clever reply, probably intended to turn the thoughts of our Lord from this subject. For one of this woman's worst problems in life had been husbands—five of them. Doubtless her reply was intended to provoke sympathy, suggesting that she was a widow.

Our Lord in a single statement revealed her horrible past. "Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Before she could drink of the Living Water, it was absolutely essential that she be brought face to face with her sin.

Of what value would the Living Water be if the woman were to continue in her sin? People have made a profession of faith in Christ without confessing their sins to Christ. They claim to be believers while they live as sinners. If one is to be saved, he must not only face his sin, but forsake his sin to follow Christ.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he cried out, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Repentance has to do with a turning away from sin. Sin must be named. It is not enough to generalize.

The Samaritan woman was astounded by our Lord's knowledge. "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet." Here was the frank admission of the repentant heart. The woman did not argue. She offered no explanation. In this statement she honestly admitted her guilt.

But even the flagrant sinner never likes to consider himself wholly bad. Thus like many when confronted with their wickedness, the woman sought to change the subject. Rather than talk about sin, she preferred to talk about religion. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and Ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Though she recognized Jesus as a prophet, she offered resistance. She sought to engage our Lord in a religious discussion. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."

A new dispensation was about to dawn under the gospel, when the place of worship would no longer be of importance. No longer would the Jews be required to go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship at the Temple, which was soon to pass away. Nor would there be any need for priests, sacrifices, and altars. Soon a Church was to be formed whereby all men of all races could have access to the Father through the Son at any time and any place.

Next our Lord pointed out the unreasonableness of the belief of the Samaritans. "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews." The Samaritans could claim no inspiration for what they taught and believed. The Jewish faith was based upon revelation, given by God down through the centuries through holy men of old. It was God's plan that the Jews be the chosen race through which the Scriptures were to be given and through which the Messiah was to come.

Our Lord continued, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The Old Testament dispensation and the manner of worship was to be done away with and the new was to be ushered in. This has to do with heart worship as opposed to external worship. "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

What our Lord said to the Samaritan woman was being used to bring her to the grand climax. "The woman saith unto Him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things." Then our Lord gave her the glorious revelation of Himself: "I that speak unto thee am He." "I am the Messiah that should come; I am the Christ." Suddenly her bewilderment was broken by gratitude and confidence as she found deliverance from her life of sin.

"And upon this came His disciples, and marveled that He talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest Thou?

or, "Why talkest Thou with her?" Since women were looked upon as being inferior to men in the time of Christ, rarely could a man converse in public with any woman. But the disciples, knowing that whatever our Lord chose to do was divinely ordained, did not question His action.

"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, 'Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?'" She "left her waterpot." Was not her purpose in going to the well to get the waterpot filled with water? Ah, yes, but she found a greater purpose. Her heart had been filled with the Living Water. As Peter, James, John, and Andrew forsook their boats and nets, as the Apostle Paul forsook whatever could have been counted gain to him, so the woman forsook her waterpot.

The Samaritan woman went to the city crying, "Come and see." What was the result? "Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him." Here were needy souls flocking to the Lord Jesus. They had heard about the Living Water. They, too, wanted to drink from the well that would never run dry.

Their response was not because one of their religious teachers went to them. This woman had an experience with God, whereby she opened her heart to Christ and went forth to tell what the Lord had done. We who know and love Christ must do the same. We may be sure that if we are faithful in witnessing to the fact of our own conversion, we shall have the joy of seeing others come to Him. The Bible says, "He that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Let us join the happy band of believers that have forsaken the waterpots of this world to tell the lost of the Living Christ who gives the satisfying water of eternal life.

## THE SATISFYING MEAT

*John 4:31-42*

"In the mean while His disciples prayed Him, saying, Master, eat. But He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of." The disciples were puzzled with this reply. "Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought Him ought to eat?" Our Lord clarified His statement: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." It is obvious that the disciples were more concerned about physical food than spiritual. Just the opposite was true of our Lord.

Christ had stated two of the primary objectives of His ministry. First, He came to do the will of His Father. Never did He deviate from this. Even in the shadow of the cross, with the weight of the world's sin weighing heavily upon Him, He prayed, "Oh My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). This should be the earnest desire of every true follower of Christ—not what we want, but what He wants for us, irrespective of the cost involved.

The other objective was to finish God's work on this earth. Looking about us at the many needs in the world today, it would seem that our Saviour did not succeed in finishing God's work. "Finish" as used here does not mean to complete God's work, but rather to consummate the work of salvation. Much of the responsibility of finishing the work of God in this needy world falls upon God's true servants. But the task of completing the plan of salvation is wholly the work of Christ. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Salvation for all men who would believe was forever completed.

The Lord Jesus reminded the disciples of the importance of

fulfilling their obligations to God immediately. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

"There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest," would seem to be a familiar proverb among the Jewish people, counting four months between seed time and harvest. But for the spiritual harvest we are not to wait even four months. "The king's business required haste" (1 Samuel 21:8). Doubtless the Lord Jesus was referring not only to the host of Samaritans that gathered in response to the transformed woman's testimony, but to the thousands in every surrounding village.

These words of our Lord are still as pertinent as when they were given, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." While we in America spend one day in pleasure and business, over five thousand Indians, Africans, and Chinese have passed into eternity, the greater percentage of them without Christ. Almost half of the population of the United States belongs to no organized church, and rarely, if ever, attend. One-third of our church members are completely inactive. How much more could be said about the gross immorality and degeneracy we are seeing before our eyes. Boys and girls, young people, adults, are in need of being born again. Let the Holy Spirit stir you up, that a new fire may be kindled. Let Him give you a new love for Christ. For as you love Him, you will love the lost and desire to sacrifice to reach the lost for Christ.

It may be that you are discouraged because even though you are faithful in witnessing to Christ and in serving Him, you see few results. Praise God, the joy is realized not only in results but in the very act of service. Our Lord speaks here of two phases of soul winning—"he that soweth" and "he that reapeth." God may use you as a sower of the seed, while He may choose someone else to be the reaper. Likewise, you may be the reaper of another believer's faithful sowing.

Christ said, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their

labours." Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist had sown the seed of God; now the disciples were to act immediately in reaping. In the same manner, the Lord Jesus Christ is calling you and me today to full and complete surrender to the control of Christ, committed to reaching the lost for Him.

After Jesus talked with the woman at the well she finally left and went into the city and told many people about Him. "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." Of course, these Samaritan people knew what this woman had been before. Seeing the miraculous change in her life, they were in dead earnest as they looked for the One who had produced such a transformation.

Every believer can learn a lesson from this as to the importance of witnessing for Christ. The Samaritan woman knew very little spiritual truth, but she knew enough to tell somebody else about Jesus. God says in His Word, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). This babe in Christ cast the bread of her testimony on the waters, and soon she found it in the many Samaritans who believed and then made their way to the well to see and hear Christ.

The curious onlookers from Samaria had great regard for Christ. "So when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them: and He abode there two days." How different they were from the Gergesenes, who prayed that Christ would depart from them. The Lord Jesus spent two days with the Samaritans. We might well conclude that He spent this time teaching and preaching. "And many more believed because of His own word." As far as we know, the Lord Jesus performed no miracles before these Samaritan people. He simply presented the truth.

We should realize that there are diversities of operations of the Holy Spirit. There are occasions and places when the gospel is embraced quickly and easily, while in other fields of the world it takes many years before there is any penetration of the Word. Our Lord did not receive the same reception among His own people as He received among these Samaritans. The Jews

“received Him not,” while the Samaritans listened willingly and responded graciously to His teaching.

Hear their own testimony as they spoke to the Samaritan woman: “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” There were no doubts in their minds. They were soundly converted. Theirs was not a mere head knowledge, but a heart experience.

## CHRIST'S HEALING POWER

*John 4:43-54*

Our Lord never wasted time. He said in Luke 4:43, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.” So Christ left Samaria. “After two days He departed thence, and went into Galilee.” He went into Galilee but not to Nazareth, which was considered His own country, “For Jesus Himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.”

Is it not said that Christ was not received in Nazareth? Of all places it was there where He was known by so many. They should have shown the greatest respect and admiration for Him. But they seemed of all people the least interested in Him. Frequently, the same is true in churches where pastors labor faithfully for many years. Though the Lord blesses with a fruitful ministry, some members of the congregation are often critical and unappreciative. The same is true in many homes. Mothers and fathers, who with unselfish devotion seek to provide the very best for their children, are frequently misunderstood and even despised. How tragic that we do not give respect and honor where it is due.

Not all of Galilee was like Nazareth. “Then when He was come into Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all

the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast." This intimates that our Lord performed many miracles in Jerusalem at the time of the passover feast which are not described in any of the four Gospels. John mentions the miracles (2:23), but no place in the Scriptures are they given in detail.

After entering Galilee, our Lord went again to Cana where He was met by a man with a heavy burden on his heart. "So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum." The nobleman had great wealth and high rank in the king's court. But wealth and position provide no promise of escape from adversity. Like many, this wealthy nobleman had been able to keep poverty from his door, but not suffering.

Desperate, the nobleman came to Christ with a ray of hope in his heart. "When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death."

The word "besought" suggests that he came begging the Lord Jesus for help. He wanted Christ to make the trip back to his home to heal the boy. Notice our Lord's reply, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It would seem that the nobleman was more interested in what Jesus could do than who He was. The nobleman had come to Jesus because he knew Christ could perform miracles. But the Lord Jesus did not come to be a miracle-worker. He came to provide life, eternal life, for all who believe. This is of far greater importance than the healing of the body.

The wealthy nobleman was in earnest when he cried out, "Sir, come down ere my child die." After what our Lord said about seeing signs and wonders, I am convinced that this father believed in his heart immediately. The rest of the narrative seems to prove this. Our Lord acted immediately in response to his faith. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and

he went his way." It seems obvious that when the nobleman came to Christ, he did not fully realize our Lord's mighty power as the Son of God. He wanted Jesus to make the trip to his home, but, of course, this was not necessary. Christ's promises are as mighty as His presence.

Why should we be any different from the nobleman? God promises in His Word, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). That means Monday's grace for Monday, Tuesday's grace for Tuesday, and so on. Why then should we borrow trouble from the future? The Lord Jesus said that we should "take no [anxious] thought for tomorrow." The law of divine grace is "sufficient unto the day." The law of divine deliverance is "a very present help." The law of divine guidance is "step by step."

It should be noted that the nobleman asked one thing while God did another, but the son was healed. God answered the man's request in His own way. Sometimes we wonder why our prayers are not answered. They are answered though not always in the manner or in the way we think they should be. His answer may be "Yes," "No," or "Wait"; but He always gives an answer. Sometimes we pray incorrectly, but God never answers incorrectly. He knows what is best for us, and He always answers in the way that will be for His glory and our good.

As the nobleman trudged along his way in going from the hill country to the lowland, he was met by his own servants who brought news that thrilled his heart, "And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth." The boy who had been so sick was well. This was not a case of improving; he was cured.

The nobleman inquired "of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The seventh hour, according to the Jewish reckoning of time, was one o'clock in the afternoon. "So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house." Here again the word "believe" is used as a full surrender to Christ. It appears that the nobleman had already

believed, even before he started his journey home. But now any questions or doubts that may have been in his mind were gone forever.

The grateful father must have recounted every detail of his experience to his family. The result was that his whole house believed. What rejoicing there must have been in that home! This home was now established upon the unshakable foundation of the Rock of Ages, Christ Jesus. God says in His Word, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). Up until this time, the nobleman's home had every available convenience, but it lacked the one important requisite to provide true happiness. So many homes are like this today. Christ is needed in the hearts of every member of the family if our homes are to experience the joy of the Lord.

# 5

## THE SORROWFUL MADE GLAD

*John 5:1-16*

The third miracle recorded in the Gospel of John took place "After this," that is, after the events already recorded. The apostle does not mean immediately afterward, for it could be read, "Later on." It seems certain that a number of days passed between the healing of the nobleman's son and the third miracle. There are many intervening events not mentioned by John.

"There was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." There is no evidence as to what feast this was. But as always, the Lord Jesus made this journey with a purpose in mind.

"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches." "The sheep market" should be translated "the sheep gate." Near this gate, leading into the city of Jerusalem, was the pool Bethesda. Bethesda means "house of mercy," or "compassion." This was well named long before our Lord arrived. Five porches had been built by this pool, on which "lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water." These porches were probably covered areas, open on all sides, whereby the multitudes of sick people could lie, protected from the sun and rain. It must have been a pitiful sight to see the scores of suffering men and women, young people, and boys and girls, with every conceivable type of illness, waiting for healing.

"An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he

had." This verse has caused difficulty among many, for it does not seem to coincide with the rest of Scripture. The verse is not found at all in most of the ancient manuscripts. It is left out of the Revised Version and several of our present-day versions. Possibly it was first written into the margin of an early translation to help explain why the multitudes were gathered at the pool. Later, someone may have thought it was a part of the inspired text, and wrote it into the account. It seems obvious, however, that it does not belong in the text.

It was not the pool that was important, but those who surrounded the pool, suffering souls waiting for relief. Does this suggest the condition of the world in which we are living today? All around us are needy hearts. Surely every Christian should be interested in helping those who are suffering physically. But of even greater importance should be our desire to relieve the anguish of those who are suffering spiritually.

Our attention is directed from the multitude to just one man. "A certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years." We are not told what this man's malady was, but it must have been severe, thirty-eight years of suffering and misery. "When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?"

What encouraging words, "Jesus saw him." Seemingly no one else was interested in this man, but "Jesus saw him." The eye of the Lord Jesus never sleeps—"He that keepeth thee will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3). Even our loved ones may forget us in the hour of our need, but God never forgets. "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). What is your need? In Christ, we have nothing to fear at any time for God sees us and knows all about us.

Christ's question to the helpless man by the pool was, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Usually God does not work against one's free will. Surely the impotent man would have been foolish not to permit Christ to heal his body. But is it not true that some people try everything but God, especially when it comes to healing the soul? God offers eternal life, hope, and blessing.

But God does not force anyone to come to Himself. He says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Man must come of his own volition to receive the Water of Life providing healing for the soul.

Notice the answer of the impotent man: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." He was looking for a "man" to give help. Evidently he had forgotten God. Little did he realize that God was standing before him as he recounted his sad plight.

But our Lord had good news. "Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath." Here was a mighty miracle. Anyone could have said, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk," but the fact that the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked proved that the speaker was the Son of God.

You can sense the joy that must have flooded the heart and soul of this man. For the first time in thirty-eight years he was able to jump to his feet and walk as other normal humans. Quickly he rolled up his pallet, put it under his arm, and walked about with joy flooding his heart.

This is a consoling picture of one's experience when he receives Christ as Saviour and Lord. His whole life is transformed. New power surges into his soul, giving him grace to live for God. Surely we must agree that the healing of the impotent man was a miracle. But what believer will not concur that the miracle of salvation is even greater. Soon these frail bodies of ours will degenerate into dust, but the soul will live on throughout eternity with Christ. A person may be down in the depths of degradation and sin; possibly an alcoholic, thinking there is no hope. He has tried and tried to overcome the evil but without success. He is like the impotent man, hopeless. There does not seem to be any way. But there is a way. Jesus asks him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" If he is willing to be made whole, if he wants to be healed, Christ will transform his life.

Not long after the impotent man was healed, serious trouble

arose. Seeing him with his pallet under his arm, some of the ecclesiastical leaders confronted him: "It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed." Just who these Jews were, we are not sure. Probably they were Pharisees, who were extremely strict in their interpretation of the law. Rather than rejoice with the man over the cure he had received, they criticized him for desecrating the Sabbath. Probably they had Jeremiah 17:21 in mind, "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day." Of course, the pallet was not a burden for the healed man; he had been delivered from his real burden.

Quickly the man replied, "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk." He respected the Lord Jesus as his authority. His critics were puzzled. "Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?" Doubtless they knew who it was, for they were watching Christ carefully, but they wanted to hear the man say it himself so they could condemn him for having a part with Christ.

The man who had been healed was so overjoyed and overwrought that he forgot to find out who it was that performed the miracle. "And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place."

The Lord Jesus was not through with this man. "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Probably the one upon whom the miracle was performed had asked many times, "Why must I suffer so?" Now we see why. This man's suffering was the result of his sin. Many of us have suffered because of our sin. That is why in every trial we must permit God to examine our hearts. There may be hidden sin within of which we are not aware.

It is dangerous to play with sin. The question is asked in Proverbs 6:27, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" Sin is far worse than fire. Few of us recognize the awfulness of sin. If we did, we would claim the victory available in Christ to overcome it.

"The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole." After the man discovered who healed him, he was not ashamed to tell those who asked him. It was not easy, because his listeners were not sympathetic. In fact, "Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the sabbath day." How hateful are sinful hearts. Because Christ did something to help a man who for thirty-eight years had found no help, He was persecuted.

Followers of Christ may expect the same treatment. Those who take a faithful stand for their Lord will not have an easy way. Not all will appreciate our witness. Some will become angry and disturbed. But remember, we are not to look to men, but to God. We are His ambassadors to proclaim the mighty gospel that can change lives.

## **EQUAL WITH THE FATHER**

*John 5:17-23*

After healing the man by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus made some of the most startling claims that ever came from His lips. What He said is not fully comprehensible by any human. Nevertheless, there is much we can understand, and thus we should consider these verses carefully and prayerfully.

In answer to the Pharisees' accusation regarding the Sabbath, our Lord replied, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." God the Father rested on the seventh day following His work of creation, but were the Lord to rest one day from His watchfulness and preservation, where would any of us be? Thus when the Lord Jesus declared, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," He meant that even as the Father never ceases in His provision of love and mercy, so He, being one with the Father, in the same manner cares for the needs of men. The

healing of the impotent man was a work of necessity and mercy, which the Scriptures permit and encourage on any day, including the Sabbath. This is not in any way a breaking of the fourth commandment. The Pharisees were so legalistic and strict in their interpretation of the law that they overlooked the importance of love and grace.

We are living in an age when men and women have thoughtlessly gone in the opposite direction. Instead of being too strict with the law, they are completely ignoring it. Sabbath day observance appears to be a thing of the past for multitudes. How we need to give heed to Mark 2:27-28: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." Man is not a machine; he is a living soul and needs at least one day a week when he can withdraw from his usual routine to give time and thought to the service of God.

Our Lord's reply to the criticism of the Pharisees created even greater problems. "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." It is obvious from what the Pharisees said that the Lord Jesus spoke of His relationship to the Father as a son in a unique sense. It is true that all who believe on the Lord Jesus are the sons of God, but the Lord made it clear that He was the Son of God in a way in which no one else could ever be. Not only was He God's Son; at the same time He was very God Himself, equal with God the Father. In Titus 2:13 the Lord Jesus is declared "the great God and our Saviour." And in Philippians 2:6 we read of Christ, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." In this verse our Lord presents the first in a series of well-grounded claims of His deity. The great fact revealed in this verse is the unity of the Father and Son. Not only can the Son do nothing of Himself; even more, He refuses to

do anything of Himself. In everything He prayed, "Nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Indeed it could be said of Him, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Psalm 40:8).

"For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will shew Him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." The Father kept no secrets. The Son was shown all things that the Father did. The "greater works" are doubtless those presented in the next several verses. At these "greater works" to be performed by Christ, men will marvel. They recognize Him as the Son of God in a unique sense proven by His miracles and power, yet some do not receive Him into the heart. If sinful, erring man could only realize the shortness of time and the necessity of making an immediate commitment to Christ, scores of people who marvel at Christ would believe on Him as Saviour and Lord.

Consider the "greater works" of which Jesus spoke. "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will." This has to do with the power of giving life, which no human possesses. Only God can give life. Jesus declared of Himself, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Not only does Christ possess the power to give physical life as He demonstrated at the tomb of Lazarus, but even more important, He gives spiritual life. Man without Christ is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). How can a dead man do anything? Christ is the Life-giver. This is the special work of the Son, committed unto Him by the Father. Man is dead because of his sin, and if he is to receive new life it must come from Christ. There is no other way.

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16). The day is coming when all will bow before the Great Judge of the universe, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue

should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). Is it not interesting that judgment is the special work of the Son? Neither the Father nor the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, have any special part in this. He who has tasted of the judgment of men is the One chosen to judge the world.

The Father committed all judgment to the Son "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him." It is amazing to consider the number of people who claim to believe in God but give no allegiance to Jesus Christ. Can one be saved by believing in God only? This verse makes it clear that unless one receives Christ into his life, it is impossible for him to honor God in whom he professes to believe. The Son is to have the same respect and honor as the Father, for He is equal with the Father.

## FROM DEATH TO LIFE

*John 5:24-29*

Jesus said, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." What is it to hear God's Word? It is much more than hearing with the physical ear; it is hearing with the heart, and by faith receiving the truth into the heart. Those who hear Christ, respond to the call of Christ. Those who refuse to hear Him, ignore Him, and reject His great salvation. He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). They "hear" and they "follow" Christ. Thus when our Lord speaks of hearing His Word, He is referring to receiving the truth into the heart.

Everlasting life becomes the possession of those who not only

hear Christ's Word but believe on the One who sent Him. The Lord Jesus is not teaching that one can be saved by believing in the Father only. There are many people who think this, but the meaning of these words goes deeper. The Lord Jesus made it clear that for one to receive eternal life he must believe in the God who sent Jesus Christ, as well as in Christ. Whoever hears the Word of Christ and believes in the Father and the Son, according to the Lord Jesus, has "everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

"Everlasting life" is spoken of as the believer's present possession, his gift immediately upon hearing the Word of Christ. "Everlasting life" means more than endless duration. It embodies the entire work of God in the life of the believer, such as forgiveness for sins, justification, adoption into the family of God, and regeneration. All these become the inheritance of the child of God instantaneously.

Even more than this, our Lord declared that the believer "shall not come into condemnation" or "judgment." The wicked will be judged for their sins at the great white throne of God. But believers will never stand before God in judgment for their sins, which have been judged already in the Person of Christ who died on the cross. God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ bore the judgment we rightfully deserve. Paul says in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

The true believer "is passed from death unto life." He who was spiritually dead becomes spiritually alive in Christ. This is not merely a change of one's attitude. It is a complete transformation of life. One mastered by the guilt and power of sin suddenly turns to walk in the light as Christ is in the light. No man can achieve this within himself. It demands the intervention of God through Christ.

"The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." "The dead" of whom Christ speaks in this verse are not the physical dead but the spiritual. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered

into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Everyone born into this world is marked by Adam's transgression. Thus all men need a spiritual resurrection, that they might walk "in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Our Lord said, "The hour is coming, and now is." He was referring to the dispensation of the grace of God, particularly to the present age which began at the birth of Christ and will continue until He returns. It was as though our Lord said, "This hour will continue, even as it is in progress at this moment." It is the hour when any man, in spite of his sinfulness, may "hear the voice of the Son of God" and be saved. To hear the voice of the Son of God is to appropriate by faith what He has said in His Word — the inspired Word of God in its entirety. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). Passages such as this, as well as Christ's words as recorded in the Gospels, are to be received as the voice of the Son of God.

Whenever you and I pick up the Word of God to look prayerfully into it and study it, we shall hear the voice of the Son of God. No wonder the psalmist said, "O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). When we realize that this Book we honor and treasure is the Word of Christ, we shall spend more time searching the Scriptures.

"For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man." The Father giving life to the Son means that as the Father is the source of all life, so is the Son. Jesus Christ possesses the authority to give life to those who are willing to believe that through the Father He is the source of life. Further, the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son. As we have already seen in verse 22, on the judgment day when the wicked will stand before the great white throne,

Christ will be the Judge "because He is the Son of man." That is, He is the Father's representative before man, and man's representative before the Father.

Quite obviously the Pharisees were astounded at what the Lord Jesus was saying, as the next statement makes clear. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." "The hour" spoken of here is different from "the hour" spoken of in verse 25. There He says "the hour is coming, and now is," but here we see that "the hour" spoken of is yet future, when "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice." Here He refers to those who are physically dead in contrast to those that are spiritually dead. Presently our Lord is quickening the souls of men, but the day is coming when He will quicken the bodies of men. Every corpse lowered into the grave will someday be raised. But have not the bodies deteriorated and gone back to dust? How will they be raised? This is no problem for the God who created them. He will re-create them the second time.

No one will escape the resurrection: "*all* that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth." This will be a great surprise to some who thought death ended it all.

Two resurrections are spoken of here: one for those "that have done good," known as "the resurrection of life"; and the other for those "that have done evil," which is "the resurrection of damnation." Various Scriptures teach that these two resurrections will not take place at the same time. They will be divided by a period of a thousand years. In Revelation 20:6 we read, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." At the culmination of this thousand-year period, the wicked will be raised. That is, they that have done evil. This is the resurrection of "damnation" (condemnation). Those that are to be raised at this time were not delivered from the condemnation of God in life as all true believers are. Thus

they must face God's eternal condemnation at the great white throne. They will be judged for their sins and cast into eternal hell. This is all vividly described for us in Revelation 20:13-14: "And they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

Perhaps you have wondered how these two judgments can be divided by a period of a thousand years when Jesus said, "the *hour* is coming." This can be interpreted in the same manner as "hour" in verse 25. Over nineteen hundred years have passed as part of the hour "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." The hour of verse 28 can mean the thousand-year period described in other portions of Scripture. God is not bound to time as we humans are. In fact, He says in 2 Peter 3:8 "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years."

On occasion there have been questions raised about the ones who shall come forth at the resurrection of life, whom Jesus described as those who have "done good." Does this suggest salvation by works? Does it appear to be a contradiction of many other verses of the Bible, such as Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Can one be saved by doing good? True believers know the answer to this. It is impossible to be saved by good works. But on the other hand, those who are saved are to do good works.

Our Lord is speaking here of the two classes of people—saved and lost. The saved are not saved because they do good; but they do good because they are saved. So He speaks of them in this light, as those who have "done good." "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). If one professes to be a follower of Christ and does not evidence his belief by good works, it is doubtful that he ever had a real heart experience with God. One reason James wrote his Epistle was to distinguish between mere professors and possessors of salvation. The possession is "works." "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and

have not works? can faith save him? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:14, 17).

Thus, as our Lord stood before the tomb of Lazarus and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43), the day is coming when He will cry with a loud voice again and the grave of every true believer around the world will be opened and we shall rise to meet our Lord in the air. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The bodies of all believers will be raised to join their souls, which at present are with the Lord. Then for a thousand years soul and body will live and reign with Christ in righteousness and peace on this earth.

What a thrilling future the child of God has. But what a sorrowful future awaits the unbelievers, "they that have done evil." The worst evil any man can commit is that of rejecting or ignoring Jesus Christ. All who do will be raised unto a resurrection of condemnation.

## UNQUESTIONABLE EVIDENCE

*John 5:30-39*

Our Lord presents unquestionable evidence of His Messiahship by reminding us of four witnesses that present this truth conclusively: His Father in Heaven, John the Baptist, His miracles, and the Old Testament Scriptures.

"I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." When Jesus said, "I can of Mine own self do nothing," this was not to suggest any limitation of His power. Rather, He was emphasizing the unity of the Spirit which prevailed with the Father and the Son.

Christ's every thought, word, and act was in glorious harmony with the will of the Father.

"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." Throughout the Old Testament God made it clear that at the mouth of two or three witnesses truth would be established. It was not enough to have one witness only. The Pharisees would not receive Christ's personal witness to Messiahship, so He presented four other witnesses that they could not deny.

"There is another that beareth witness of Me; and I know that the witness which He witnesseth of Me is true." Some would relate this witness to John the Baptist, of whom we read in the next verse. It would seem, however, that the Lord Jesus is speaking of the witness of the Father, of whom He continues to speak in verse 37, "And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape." Verse 32 cannot refer to John the Baptist because "witnesseth" is in the present tense. John the Baptist had long since been gone. He had been martyred for his faithful stand for Christ. Surely there is a sense in which "he being dead yet speaketh," but it does not appear to be the case here.

Christ assured His hearers that the Father's testimony was "true." The Father had declared of Christ, "This is My beloved Son: hear Him" (Luke 9:35). This should be enough evidence for anyone. But it is obvious that belief is not as dependent upon evidence as upon a will to believe. The Pharisees were stern religionists, fundamentalists in their interpretation of the law but liberals in their willingness to obey the law. On one occasion our Lord used the expression, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). God had given all the evidence anyone could have desired in the Old Testament Scriptures. But in spite of this, men refused to believe, because of the hardness of their hearts.

Christ's second witness was John the Baptist. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. he was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing

for a season to rejoice in his light." When John the Baptist was confronted by the delegation sent by the priests and Levites to determine if he were the Messiah that should come, he made it clear that he was not, and gave a clear-cut witness to Christ.

John the Baptist was merely a man, not the Messiah or some unusual prophet. But in spite of this, the blinded Pharisees were willing to accept John as more than a man. The Lord Jesus was not dependent upon what John the Baptist did to make Him what He was, the Son of God; He was the Son of God long before John the Baptist came.

John had been persecuted, imprisoned, and finally murdered by Herod. Already his testimony had been forgotten by many, but not by our Lord. Nothing ever done for the glory of God is forgotten by Christ. I suppose some in learning of the death of John said, "Isn't it too bad? All he did was in vain." Nothing done for God is ever in vain. "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

"But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me." Here is the third witness—Christ's miracles. The words "greater witness" do not suggest that John's witness was not important. The witness of Christ's miracles was greater because the Son of God performed these miracles. Anything God does is greater than that which man does. John experienced unusual popularity when his ministry first began. Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees participated in his baptism. In spite of his popularity, John had performed no miracles. Christ came healing the lepers, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead; yet He was not shown as much attention as was John. Does this not suggest the hardness of unbelieving hearts?

We must never lose sight of the purpose of Christ's miracles. Jesus did not come to be a miracle-worker. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). His miracles were, however, an evidence of His authority to seek and to save

the lost: "The same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me."

It is obvious that the Father's witness of the Son was not only the verbal witness given at Christ's baptism and on other occasions, but the entire witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. In verses 37-38 Christ told the Pharisees, "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape. And ye have not His word abiding in you: for whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not." The Pharisees professed to be authorities on God and the Scriptures. Jesus informed them of their ignorance of the truth, their heartless, Spiritless, outward ceremony. How well they are described by the Apostle Paul, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5).

The fourth witness to the Lord's Messiahship is the Scriptures: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." Some consider these words to be a command, that the Pharisees go and search the Old Testament Scriptures, where in word, type, and ceremony Christ is presented as the coming Messiah. Others consider the verse an assertion, rather than a command. Our Lord said, "Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." I am prone to accept the latter view. The Pharisees did search the Scriptures, but they read the Old Testament with blinded hearts. Thus Jesus said, "Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." They thought by their much reading of the Old Testament they would gain eternal life. This was not the purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures, but rather "They are they which testify of Me." The Old Testament with which the Pharisees were so familiar was given to be a witness to Christ. In all their study they had missed that of greatest importance—the scores of prophecies that had been fulfilled before their eyes in the coming of Christ.

Eternal life is not found in the Scriptures, but in the Christ who is presented in the Scriptures. "To Him [that is, the Lord Jesus Christ] give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of

sins" (Acts 10:43). The Pharisees missed the purpose of the Word of God. Many in our day are guilty of the same error. They read the Bible but they do not know the Christ of the Bible. Bible reading has little value without Christ in the heart, for it is Christ who makes the Bible live.

## HARDENED HEARTS

*John 5:40-47*

Our Lord comes now to the conclusion of His address to His critics, the Pharisees. One cannot help but feel that divine power restrained these enemies of Christ as He spoke so pointedly of the evils of their wicked lives.

Our Lord condemned them for their rejection of Him: "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life." Here Christ revealed the reason why lost souls are barred from Heaven—they do not *will* to come to Him. There are many reasons that could be given for this: neglect, love of sin, unbelief, love for money, and many more; but basically, the lost go to eternal hell simply because they refuse to come to Christ.

Much of the force of our Lord's concluding remark to the Pharisees is lost in our English translation. Literally, He declared, "Ye have no desire or inclination to come to Me." Their hearts were filled with everything but a love and a concern for God. John 3:19 seems to fit so well with these words of our Lord, "Men loved darkness rather than light."

What was true of the Pharisees is true of many today. They offer shallow, groundless excuses, but the real reason why they have not come to Christ is that they do not want to come. They refuse to come.

Next our Lord told the Pharisees, "I receive not honour from men." It was not for His own honor that our Lord came to earth, but for the benefit of mankind. "The Son of

man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). God is not favored by our belief. He receives nothing by our obedience; we are the beneficiaries.

"But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." The Pharisees were cold and legalistic. Indeed, what our Lord said to these Pharisees could be said to many in our churches today, "Ye have not the love of God in you." It is possible to be scripturally correct, to be well versed in the Bible, to be an earnest searcher of the truth, and yet to miss the important requisite for blessing—a heart filled to overflowing with the love of God.

"I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." The proof that the Pharisees did not love God was that they did not receive His Son. If they had truly loved God, they would have gladly welcomed Christ. Many public teachers had appeared and they all had their following. But when Christ appeared, the Pharisees had nothing to do with Him.

"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Much of what the Pharisees said and did was prompted by a desire to receive praise from men. The Lord had said, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matthew 6:1,5). We are not to parade our worship before the eyes of men. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6). Much of the religious activity of the Pharisees was mere grandstand religion, rather than sincerity of heart. The "honour that cometh from God" should be considered above all else. It is

not, what do others think about my beliefs, but how does God feel about them?

Christ reminded the Pharisees of their unbelief. "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust." The Pharisees professed to believe Moses. Daily they read the Pentateuch in the synagogue. Did they really believe his writings? "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me." Throughout the five books of Moses, Jesus Christ is seen repeatedly—in prophecy, in types, in the sacrificial offerings, and in the ceremonial cleansing. Like many in our own day, the Pharisees knew nothing about this. Though they had read the law repeatedly, they had never seen Christ in these writings. They were blind to the truth.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Our Lord bound the Old Testament to the New Testament, and upheld the sacred Scriptures as God-breathed.

Since the Bible is what God declares it to be, the Word of God, it is essential that we who profess to love Christ spend time in it, studying its holy truths. The only safeguard we have for wickedness, on the one hand, and our foolish notions, on the other, is the truth of the Scriptures. How can I test the many false teachers that confront me every day of my life if I am not grounded in the Word of God? I cannot trust the voice of the church; she has too many voices. I cannot trust the voices of my friends; they change so frequently. I cannot even trust the voice of my own heart; it is so fanciful and deceitful. There is one voice only that is always the same. The Bible is the Word of God, not to be placed on a shelf, not to be kept in a drawer, not to become dust-covered, but to be read, received, and believed. Take time for God's Word. If you have no time for the Word of God, you have no time for Christ, for Jesus declared, "In the volume of the book it is written of Me" (Psalm 40:7).

# 6

## THE MULTITUDE FED

*John 6:1-14*

Someone has described the feeding of the five thousand as the greatest miracle Jesus ever performed. The fact that it is the only one of our Lord's miracles recorded in all four Gospels suggests its importance. Only two other events are recorded in all the Gospels—the crucifixion and the resurrection. In the feeding of the five thousand we see our Lord's creative power displayed. He can make much out of little, or if He so desires, He can make something out of nothing. As the Creator, Christ is the great Provider. The true believer may rest in the fact that whatever his need, the Lord Jesus who multiplied the loaves and fishes is able to meet every need.

"After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias." Probably Christ was seeking some much needed rest. As His fame spread abroad more and more, this seemed to be an impossibility. John tells us that "a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased." Doubtless many in the crowd were ill and wanted healing. Others were the usual curiosity seekers.

Arriving on the other side of the sea of Galilee, "Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples." They probably planned to discuss their recent travels, to be followed by a prayer meeting in preparation for the next journey. It is at this point in his account that the apostle makes a statement that seems to be strictly parenthetical, yet it has an important bearing upon much that is said in this entire chapter. "And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh." Doubtless many of

those in the multitudes that followed Christ were on their way to Jerusalem for the passover. Little did they realize that the One who fed them with the bread and fishes was actually the One whom the passover typified. Once a year during the month of April Jews flocked to Jerusalem to partake of the sacrificial lamb in remembrance of their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage. At the same time, they looked for another deliverer who would release them from their Roman yoke.

"When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" This is not to be interpreted as surprise on the part of our Lord at seeing so many people. The multitude had been there for some time. Christ had been preaching and teaching before them. Our Lord was primarily concerned about their souls, but He also had a heart concern for their bodily welfare. He knew they were without food.

Turning to Philip, Christ said, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" How understanding, how practical, our Lord is. We who follow Him should be the same way. Some of the most zealous Christians seem to be so impractical. Though people have souls, these souls live in human bodies. Our task is more than soul winning. We are to be comforters and helpers like our Lord. If someone is sick and in need, it is not enough to assure them that we will pray for them. We are to visit them, care for them, and do whatever we can to help. This is practical Christianity, such as our Lord was teaching Philip and the other disciples.

Why did our Lord ask Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Why not Peter, James, or one of the other disciples? It would seem that Philip needed special help at this time. But on the other hand, all the disciples profited by it. We are told that the question was asked "to prove him"—not to Christ, but to himself. All of us need to be proved occasionally. But note this added word, "For He Himself knew what He would do." That is, the Lord Jesus did not ask this question expecting help from Philip, for Christ already knew that He was going to perform a miracle and provide for the hungry

multitude. Christ desired to prove Philip, that this servant of God might be helped in his own spiritual growth.

Philip replied, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." The Roman penny, the "denarius," was worth much more than our penny. Two hundred Roman pennies would have purchased a large quantity of food, but it would have been nothing in comparison to the crowd. Philip was actually saying, "The task is impossible." By this time he should have known better than to tell Christ anything was impossible. Philip had witnessed the changing of water into wine. He knew about the nobleman's son who was healed. He had seen the miracle performed for the paralytic. He should have cried out, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Andrew had something to say, but this did not look very hopeful either. "One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" We must give Andrew credit for looking around in an attempt to help. Walking through the crowds, the only trace of food he could find was a little boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two small fishes—a loaf for a thousand men. Thus Andrew's answer was about as bad as Philip's, "What are these among so many?"

The Lord Jesus provided the solution to the problem. "Make the men sit down." This was step number one. Our God is not a God of confusion, but of order. The time and setting was perfect for the circumstances. "Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand." Being the time of the passover feast, it was springtime, the cold, winter months had passed and the intense heat of summer was not yet upon them. It must have been a refreshing experience out on the mountainside seated on the blanket of grass.

"Men" used here means men as distinguished by contrast from women. There were many women in the audience, but among them John informs us that there were five thousand men.

"Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would." Taking the lunch donated by a small boy, Christ lifted His eyes heavenward, and gave thanks to the Father. He then called the disciples to receive the food from His hand, with the instructions to feed those who were patiently waiting. They obeyed His command, and after distributing the food, returned to find His hands filled with more. They went out and returned back time and time again, and the supply was inexhaustible. Little is much when God is in it.

"When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten." No one went hungry. In fact, there was over and above that which was needed. But though Christ supplies abundantly, He is never friendly toward waste or extravagance.

"This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Christ's miracles were always performed with a purpose in mind. The Old Testament Scriptures were brought to life in the minds of many. They thought Jesus was the Prophet spoken of by Moses who should come. Though we are not told here, yet it seems reasonable that many believed and were transformed that day as they realized that Jesus was the Eternal God. He who could provide food for the body could certainly provide food for the soul.

## WALKING ON THE SEA

*John 6:15-21*

The thousands who were fed by Christ were enthralled by His mighty miracle. They wanted to claim Him as their king immediately, not necessarily because they recognized Him as the Son of God, but because of His power to perform miracles. But this was not His purpose in coming into this world. "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone." Earlier Satan had made a similar appeal when he took Christ to a high mountain where he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9). Satan is willing to go to the most ridiculous extremes in his attempt to further his purposes. Doubtless he was guilty of inspiring the multitude Christ fed to make this second appeal to make Him a king.

Our Saviour's response suggests conclusively that He is the Son of God. If He had been a mere man He would have snatched this opportunity for achievement. But Christ "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Our Lord's response reveals His profound humility. He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). It was not His time to become king. The day yet remains when He shall come back again, not to die on a cross but to rule with a rod of iron as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ "departed again into a mountain Himself alone." Every believer is to be where people are, so that they might witness for Christ. But there are to be periods in our busy schedules when we withdraw from everyone to be alone with

God. If the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, needed this aloneness with the Father, how much more you and I must resort to the quiet time. No day should be permitted to pass without at least some time in the presence of the Lord.

In the meantime, the disciples who had stayed on with the multitudes prepared to cross back over the sea of Galilee. "And when even was now come, His disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." Both Matthew and Mark tell us that our Lord had "constrained" them to leave for the opposite shore of Galilee. Thus the little band of disciples climbed into the borrowed boat to begin their journey of six or seven miles across the sea toward Capernaum.

Our Lord spent more time and performed more miracles in and around Capernaum than in any other place. Doubtless this was what He meant when He said, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matthew 11:23). With all the opportunities that were given the people in Capernaum to believe, many of them hardened their hearts toward Christ. How serious is the responsibility when one knows what to do but refuses to do it.

It was "dark, and Jesus was not come to them." The word is really "darkness." This is suggestive of the age in which we are living. There is so much misery and sorrow, and still Jesus has not come. But where was Jesus as the disciples pointed the bow of their little boat out into the darkness? He was in the mountain. Doubtless He was interceding for His disciples as He intercedes for His own today. He is the faithful High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession for" His people.

"And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." The disciples entered into the boat after sundown. It seemed to be an extremely dark night, for a storm was on its way. The farther they rowed, the more tempestuous the sea became. This must have been a difficult experience for the disciples. Only

hours before, they had witnessed one of the greatest miracles Christ had ever performed. They were convinced that He could do all things. Now out on the sea, in the midst of a terrifying storm, they found themselves faced with possible shipwreck, even drowning. Where was Christ? Why did He not do something? Should His faithful followers be expected to face storms such as this? Yes, this is the believer's lot. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). Trials are an important part of being a Christian. How would we react toward God were we permitted to bask in the sunshine of ease and satisfaction continuously? Storms are necessary. Someone has said, "Many of God's greatest blessings have come to us in rough wrappings, but there is gold inside."

We are not told *why* the disciples had to face the storm, but something far better transpired. Christ went to them and calmed the storm. "So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid." The disciples had been rowing about nine hours, which would make it about 3:00 A.M., and they were only halfway across the sea.

We sense something of the severity of the storm when we realize that most of the disciples were rugged, outdoor men. Several of them had been fishermen. They knew all about the sudden storms that arose on the sea of Galilee. Yet they were frightened. But they were even more afraid when they saw the human form walking on the sea, coming closer and closer. It seemed to be Christ but they were not sure until He spoke: "It is I; be not afraid."

Some have questioned this miracle of Christ's walking on the sea. Would it not be within the power of the One who established the laws of nature to suspend them at will? He who created the sea could certainly control the sea. We worship a Christ who is Lord of all. All things are made by Him and all things are controlled by Him. He is sufficient for every problem of life.

After hearing His voice, the disciples "willingly received Him

into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." Actually there are two miracles here: Christ's walking on the sea, and the ship's immediately reaching the port. It made all the difference in the world when Christ stepped into the ship. In the same manner, it makes all the difference when Christ is received into one's life. How many are floundering about on the sea of life, fearful and disturbed, without God's peace. They need Christ.

Can you imagine what might have happened to that ship had the disciples refused to permit Christ to enter the boat? But the Scripture says they "*willingly* received Him into the ship." Of their own accord and volition, they invited Him to come in. He would not have entered in any other way. Nor does He enter the heart of anyone who will not receive Him willingly.

## MEAT THAT ENDURETH

*John 6:22-27*

We now return to the northeast shore of Galilee where there seemed to be some consternation regarding the absence of the Lord Jesus. "The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto His disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples were gone away alone." Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus constrained the multitude to leave before He went up into the mountain to pray. But some of them were determined that Jesus should become their king, thus they stayed on through the night, expecting to see Him again in the morning.

News spread rapidly after the feeding of the multitude. "(Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks)." Gradually the shoreline became crowded with small

boats manned by curiosity seekers who had come to see Jesus. Doubtless there were some sincere souls who were more than curiosity seekers. But many of those who hastened to the area were coming merely to join the others in their attempt to compel Jesus to become their king. They too were interested in bread without work.

"When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus." It is hard to estimate how many people might have been in the crowd. Many of them left when our Lord urged them to leave. On the other hand, many remained. And, of course, the crowd was getting larger continually by those who were coming in from other areas. They crowded into the little boats that lined the shore and departed for the west side of the sea, since Jesus was no longer in the mountain. Theirs was a pleasant trip with no storm such as Christ's followers faced. It is not known just where they landed. John simply says, "they . . . came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus."

It would seem that when the many small ships arrived Jesus was down at the shore, for He was found so easily. "When they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" "When" carries the thought of "how." Doubtless some of them were more alarmed at this than when they saw Him feed the multitude. They knew there had only been one boat by the seaside when the disciples left. When did Jesus leave the mountain and how could He have possibly gotten to Capernaum?

Christ never permitted Himself to become involved with trivialities. If He had told them how He had gotten to Capernaum, they probably would not have believed Him. He proceeded immediately to get at the heart of the matter. "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Christ revealed the true nature of their hearts. They were insincere, hypocritical. Jesus said to them, "Ye seek Me." It would have been wonderful if He could have said, "Ye seek Me because ye love Me." But such was not the case. They sought Him for selfish gain.

Our Lord made it clear that His real ministry was not to feed men but to save men. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed." The seekers who had come to Jesus desired help for the temporal, but He had something better to offer, help for the spiritual.

Christ did not say, "Labor *not*," but rather, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth." Our God despises idleness. He has declared, "That if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Some are not guilty of idleness, but are at the same time committing grave error; they work day and night, but for the wrong thing, "the meat which perisheth." Their one interest in life seems to be in making money. God's servant said, "Thy money perish with thee" (Acts 8:20).

Christ is not against anyone's being industrious. In fact, He has given some people tremendous business ability with the accompanying gift of making money. The wrong comes in the failure to use the money properly. Money used for the glory of God can be "meat which endureth." To squander it on our own selfish interests can be "meat which perisheth."

If you want to have the time of your life, see how much of your money you can put to work for God. If you have the money-making faculty, remember that it is a gift from the Lord. Thank God for it and use it for His glory. But, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psalm 62:10). Do not worship riches. Invest your money in the service of the Lord. If you do, you will find supreme happiness never known before. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth," but invest all you are and have in the souls of men. This is "meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

Those in the audience to which Jesus was speaking, were selfish, carnal natures, interested primarily in self-gratification. But the grace and mercy of God is just the opposite. They were interested in taking; God desired to give. Jesus, in speaking of the "meat which endureth unto everlasting life," referred to it as that "which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him

hath God the Father sealed." Even though their motive was insincere, God was willing to give them this life if they would receive it by faith. Christ knew the motives of everyone in His audience, but He still desired to give them life. He knew their past. He was familiar with their wickedness. But His grace was sufficient.

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*John 6:28-34*

It is obvious that our Lord's listeners had only a partial understanding of what He meant to labor "for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." Thus they asked the question, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" This is the attitude of the natural man. It is difficult for him to receive the message of grace. He desires to do something, endeavoring to earn salvation.

The heart of man is naturally wicked. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Without the intervention of God's grace, man's heart will remain "only evil continually." One cannot change his own sinful condition. If one could save himself by good works, it would not have been necessary for Christ to die, and the doer of the good works could boast of what he had done to earn his salvation. But God will not permit any flesh to glory in His sight.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Perhaps you say, well, there is no work to believing. That is true. Jesus did not say this is *your* work, He said it is the work *of God*. God did all the work, leaving nothing for you to do but believe. Yet this seems to be one of the hardest things for mankind to do. To

believe is more than the acceptance of facts revealed in the Scriptures about Christ. It is to receive the very Person of Christ into one's life.

Some think that if they give affirmation to certain facts as they are stated in the Bible, such as the miraculous birth of Christ, His sinless life, His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His coming again, they have believed. Not at all. Many believe these facts but have never received Christ. John 1:12 makes the meaning of belief clear: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Here you have the words, "receive" and "believe." To believe on Christ is to receive Christ. Both are involved in scriptural salvation. What then "is the work of God"? "That ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." You must believe in the Father and the One He has sent to be the Saviour of all who believe.

Rather than believe in Christ, His listeners made a request. "They said therefore unto Him, What sign shewest Thou then, that we may see, and believe Thee? what dost Thou work?" The Pharisees were running out of arguments. They had seen a miracle only twenty-four hours before. They had witnessed the superb and abundant provision for the multitudes in the desert. But they said we must *see* before we believe.

Our Lord's critics tried to discredit what Christ had done on the previous day by comparing it with what their fathers had experienced in a previous age. "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." In other words, "What you did yesterday was nothing considering what Moses did years ago. You fed the people only once, but he fed the people for forty years." How slow of heart these men were to believe. How blind they were to the truth. Our Lord had performed a mighty miracle before their eyes, yet in twenty-four hours they asked, "What dost Thou work?"

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but My Father giveth you the true bread from Heaven." The bread received from Heaven in Moses' day was material bread. This was

something of far greater importance—the spiritual, about which Christ was speaking, “the true bread from heaven.” It should be noted that the word “giveth” as used in verse 32 means “to offer.” The true bread from Heaven is offered to all men. But until it is received, it is of no value to the unbelieving heart.

Christ declared, “For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” There is no question about the true bread in the light of these words. It is Christ, the Son of God. The manna in the Old Testament was typical, but Christ, the manna of the New Testament, is the true bread, the “bread of God . . . which cometh down from heaven.” The manna of the Old Testament was only for a small number of the inhabitants of the world; approximately six hundred thousand Israelites. Christ did not come for the few, “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

After Christ spoke of the “bread of God . . . which cometh down from heaven,” those in His audience cried out, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” This verse appears to be very encouraging. But these people were like the woman at the well, who at first had only a partial understanding of Jesus’ words. They were still thinking in terms of the temporal, having not perceived the truth of the spiritual. This is obvious because our Lord proceeds with His discourse on the Bread of Life. He made no acknowledgment of their request, knowing that it was purely of the flesh.

### THE WELCOME INVITATION

*John 6:35-40*

Christ declared, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never

thirst." As the body without food is plagued by hunger pangs, so the soul without Christ is famished by sin.

To partake of the Bread of Life one must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. What is it to come to Christ? It is to recognize one's total inability within himself to meet the demands of his soul, to realize his sinfulness, and with utter abandonment of any human effort whatsoever, to rely completely upon Christ for eternal salvation. To the one who comes and believes, the Lord Jesus declares he shall "never hunger" and "never thirst."

This does not mean that he will never sin again. But never again will his soul be destitute of the spiritual food essential to keep it alive. Christ, the Bread of Life, is always available for him. The believer is privileged to turn to Christ immediately for forgiveness. God promises, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Thus, even though the weight of sin may be heavy upon the believer, confession in the name of Christ results in immediate forgiveness.

After one has truly believed on Christ, the Bread of Life, sin need no longer be his master. Paul declared in Romans 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you." The believer is delivered from the penalty and power of sin, with the prospect of some day being delivered from its presence. The unsaved man cannot say this, for try as he may, he is dominated by sin.

The Lord Jesus said, "Ye also have seen Me, and believe not," doubtless referring to the thirtieth verse where some in His audience asked, "What sign [miracle] shewest Thou then, that we may see, and believe Thee?" Christ is the greatest sign of all. His very presence in their midst was a miracle. He who was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament came from the glory of Heaven to be born into this world with a miraculous birth. There He stood before them declaring, "Ye also have seen Me, and believe not." In other words, they said if they were permitted to see a miracle, then they would believe. Jesus was a miracle, but they did not believe. Here again we are reminded of the hardness of impenitent, unconverted hearts.

But in spite of their hardness of heart, God's plan cannot be

hindered or limited. The weaknesses of men never frustrate the grace of God. Christ assured His hearers: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." In spite of the rebellion and unbelief among humans, there are some who will hear the truth and come to God. The word "all" as used here does not mean particular individuals. Rather, it connotes the idea of everyone, "all," as a body. In other words, the entire Body of Christ will be saved according to God's appointment. Not one member will be missing. All will be there at the time when the saints are caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air.

But we must not overlook an important fact. If one is to be among those in the "all," he must first be among those who have already come to Him for salvation. "Him that *cometh* to Me I will in no wise cast out." No matter how unworthy we are Christ will receive us. What a marvelous invitation this is.

"For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." Christ came for one purpose only—to do the will of the Father. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." It is His will that nothing the Father has given to Christ should be lost; and it is the Father's will that all who believe on Christ should be saved.

Salvation is not believing and then struggling; it is believing and then relying on God to sustain us moment by moment. We are assured of the Lord's watchful care and guidance all through our Christian pilgrimage on this earth. We read in 2 Samuel 8:6 that "the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went." The same can be said about every believer. God will not take His eyes from us for a moment: "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

I have heard people say on occasion, "I would like to become

a Christian but I fear I could not hold out." In himself, no one can hold out. It is the Lord who does the holding. Though one may be surrounded with temptations, the promise of the Scripture is, "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). One who belongs to God through Christ will never be lost. Two times in these verses we are told that those who are in Christ will be raised up at the last day. Not only will God preserve them while they live, but He will continue to care for them after death. This has to do with the believer's resurrection which will take place at the return of Christ. "Behold, I shew you a mystery," God says. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). What a thrilling future the believer has.

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

*John 6:41-51*

"The Jews then murmured at Him, because He said, I am the bread which came down from heaven." With enmity in their hearts they discussed what He had said, refusing to believe. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?" In the original, "this," as used here, expresses scorn and contempt. It is as though they had said, "Is not this braggart the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" Refusing to accept the truth of the virgin birth, they could not fathom how Jesus could come down from Heaven. Had He begun His public ministry with a mighty army and great wealth, perhaps they would have recognized Him. But coming as He did, a poor peasant with a few fishermen and public ser-

vants as followers, His listeners were skeptical. Of course, this was prophesied in the Old Testament. "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isaiah 53:2-3).

"Murmur not among yourselves." How surprised the unbelieving Jews must have been to learn that Jesus knew what they were mumbling about. One would think that this would be enough to convince their hardened hearts that the Lord Jesus was more than mere man. But unbelief is terrible. It robs needy hearts of possible peace and comfort.

Next, the Lord Jesus said, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Here is an important lesson in soul winning. No man will come to Christ unless the Father draws him. Now do not misunderstand. God expects us as believers to be as "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). But let us not be so wise that we overlook the true source of power and conviction. Our part in personal evangelism is minor compared to God's part. In the drawing power is the quickening power. Every lost soul, according to the Bible, is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). God must give the enlightenment so that the unsaved might appropriate Christ by faith. Those who would be used of God in pointing the lost to Christ must be men and women of prayer; realizing that it is God who draws the unregenerate to Christ.

"And I will raise him up at the last day." Our Lord had said this twice before. Repetition in Scripture always indicates something of extreme value and importance. All true Christians will be raised at the return of Christ.

As the Lord Jesus had said to His hearers on so many occasions, He reminded them again that what He was saying was not new, it could all be found in the Old Testament Scriptures! "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of

God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me." Divine truth is made known through divine power. What was true in the Old Testament concerning listening to God is true in the New.

"Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father." No one has ever seen God the Father except God the Son. Thus the Lord Jesus had a perfect right to speak of Himself as "He which is of God."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." With these words the Lord Jesus returns to the main theme of His discourse which had been interrupted by the murmuring of the Jews. Clearly and distinctly Christ tells His listeners that He is the only One to whom men may go for eternal life. Whoever believes on Him becomes the recipient not merely of life but everlasting life.

"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead." The Jews in Christ's audience had boasted of the manna given to their fathers by God. But this manna did not keep their fathers alive. They were dead. Only Christ can give eternal life. "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." There are some who speak of Christ's example and good life. Indeed, He provided an example. No one could find anything wrong with His life. But it was not His life that was important, it was His death: "the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "The bread" for the soul of man is not found in following the example of Christ, it is experienced in believing in His death, burial, and resurrection. Christ was living His life before those who listened to Him give His discourse on the Bread of Life, but He spoke of something future, "the bread that I *will give*." Later He did this in offering up Himself of His own volition on the cross. For whom? There need be no doubt about it, "the world." His sacrifice was made for all who believe. He is "the Lamb of God, which

taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). How wonderful that this Bread of Life made possible on the cross of Calvary is for everyone.

### FLESH TO EAT

*John 6:52-59*

"The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" The *striving* was different from the *murmuring*. It suggests that Christ's audience became more angry as He progressed with His discourse. Not willing to recognize Him as the One He was, they spoke of Him as "this man," merely another philosopher seeking to sell His peculiar teachings.

With the crowd in a frenzied state, and opposition having reached its peak, our Lord gave the people a profound truth which to our day is misunderstood by many. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." The importance of this statement is evidenced in the use of the word "except." Our Lord did not use this word frequently, but when He did it was something of marked importance.

What does it mean to "eat the flesh" and "drink the blood" of the Son of God? First of all, let us be sure it does not mean a literal eating of Christ's flesh nor drinking of His blood. Nor does this have anything to do with the communion service. For it is not through the partaking of the bread and wine at the communion table that one receives life. The dying thief on the cross did not have the privilege of receiving communion after his conversion, but he had eternal life.

There is no alternative here, according to our Lord, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." It was an expansion of the truth of verse 51,

“The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” This can mean nothing else than the sacrifice He made for our sins on the cross. Thus in speaking of “eating of His flesh” and “drinking of His blood,” He referred to that act of faith whereby the believing heart receives the work of Christ on the cross as the substitutionary fulfillment for the payment of sin. It is to receive Christ as one’s Saviour and Lord, acknowledging His death on the cross as the vicarious sacrifice for sin. Unless one recognizes the fact that the body of Christ was broken and His precious blood was shed for sin, he cannot possibly receive eternal life. To “eat of His flesh” and to “drink of His blood” is to receive Christ by faith. When we eat physical food, we receive it. It becomes a part of us. So when one eats and drinks of Christ, he receives Christ. Christ becomes a part of the believer.

In verse 54, the Lord Jesus restates conversely what he had already stated in verse 53. “Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life.” As He said previously, “Except ye eat and drink, ye have no life.” He now says, “Whoever eats and drinks has life.” It is interesting to note that the word “eateth” used in this verse and also in verse 56 is different from that used in verse 53. As used here, it means a continual eating of the flesh and blood of Christ rather than a once-and-for-all eating and drinking. The reason for this change in the use of words is obvious. One is eternally saved the moment he invites Christ to come into his life by faith. But the believer does not stop with this initial act. We must eat of His body and drink of His blood continually. Day by day the child of God must live in constant fellowship and communion with Christ.

Does this suggest an uncertainty of one’s salvation? Is salvation dependent upon one’s daily experience? If one has truly eaten of the body and drunk of the blood of Christ, he will desire to have daily communion and fellowship with Him. This desire within the heart of the believer is a strong evidence of his conversion. What our Lord has said here renders ridiculous the words of some who declare that they believe on Christ and yet

they give no evidence of a holy and godly life effected by the power of Christ. Believing of facts does not necessarily save. There must be daily fellowship with the Lord as an evidence of heart belief. We read in 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

None of us has the strength to live the Christian life alone. We are dependent upon Christ living through us. Doubtless, that is why Jesus used this word for "eateth." He wanted us to see how dependent we are upon Him for our continued spiritual existence. We must commune with Him and talk with Him all through the day, committing our little frettings and cares to Him, seeking His power to overcome temptation, drawing upon Him for the constant victory that can be found in Him only.

Those who live daily in this experience will have no fear after death. For Jesus said, "I will raise him up at the last day." This is the fourth time in this chapter that our Lord has made this statement. Thus it is something that must not be overlooked.

"For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." The word "indeed" used here could also be translated "truly." In other words, Christ is food and drink in the highest and fullest sense. The fact that millions are burning out their lives to make money while practically ignoring Christ convinces me that they think money is food and drink, that they think they have found real life. Satan has scores of delusive traps laid in the paths of needy souls in his attempt to keep them from Christ.

There is a special intimacy expressed in these words of our Lord. He speaks of our dwelling in Him and His dwelling in us. Here is double assurance of God's sustaining and protective care. Sometimes because of the neglect of the quiet time or perhaps because of our sin, we feel that Christ has been crowded out of our lives. Of course, we only feel this way. Feelings can be very convincing. But one thing is certain, the believer can never be crowded out of Christ. We are in Him, and have no reason to worry or to be fearful. Christ feels our every heart-ache and understands our every sorrow. We may confidently

trust Him for all things; as we are told in Colossians 3:3, "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

"As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." Let no believer think he can live for a tiny second without the strength and help of the indwelling Christ. In John 15:5 Jesus declared, "Without Me ye can do nothing." We must not look to our frail flesh, for, if we do, we shall be defeated. It is Christ who gives life and it is Christ who sustains life.

"This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum." It is believed by some that Jesus spoke part of this discourse to His hearers who had gathered after coming to Capernaum by boat, and then breaking it off abruptly, He moved into one of the synagogues where He continued to speak on the living bread in the presence of the many Jews that gathered. Not too much is said about this, but much is said about the Living Bread, so that there is no need of anyone missing the point, that He is the Bread of God who came from Heaven to provide food for the souls of all men who believe on Him.

## FALSE DISCIPLES

*John 6:60-65*

"Many therefore of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" Do not be misguided by this word, "disciples," for the ones spoken of were those who followed Jesus because of mere selfish and carnal interests. They had not acknowledged Him as the Lord of their lives. By following Him across the sea of Galilee, they simply appeared to be His disciples.

What Christ taught was not "hard" in the sense that it could not be understood, but because His hearers refused to receive it. Those who resist Christ will not find His teachings understandable.

"When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you?" Doubtless Christ did not hear their murmurings. However, being God, He knew that they were disturbed by His saying, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." This they considered to be blasphemy.

Christ thrust another profound truth before them: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" Not only did Christ come from Heaven, but He assured them that He would ascend back into Heaven, the place "where He was before." "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." There seem to be several meanings embodied in these words. Many of our Lord's hearers interpreted what He had been teaching from the physical or material point of view. Christ emphasized again that what He was saying was to be understood in the vein of the spiritual, "The flesh profiteth nothing."

There seems to be, however, an even greater truth presented in these words. Let no one think for a minute that he can earn his salvation by what he does. It is the Spirit that quickeneth. Thousands have been deluded into thinking that by their good works they are earning life eternal. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." What the Lord Jesus said about His coming down from Heaven and of the essential need of believing on Him, is the truth which the Holy Spirit uses to open hearts to God. As this truth is believed, these teachings of Christ will become life, spiritual life, eternal life, so that those who believe on Him will be made new creatures in Him. Christ expounded the truth; He proved it by His death and resurrection.

But, "There are some of you that believe not." Our Lord

wanted them to understand that He could see through their hypocrisy.

Knowing that some would persist in unbelief, Christ said, "No man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father." Man, being dead in trespasses and sin, is unable to believe without the quickening grace of God the Father. But when the Father provides spiritual enlightenment, unless that one exercises faith in the eternal Christ, he can never be saved. As long as one continues in unbelief he will remain under the condemnation of God.

The Bible is clear in Romans 10:13: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is God's Word. All who act according to this promise will be saved.

## UNQUESTIONABLE CONFIDENCE

*John 6:66-71*

We come now to a most unhappy conclusion to one of the greatest discourses of our Lord. One might think there would have been a ready response to acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord. But what was the result? "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Christ had spoken about the spiritual; His hearers were concerned about the material. Thus, they forsook Him to live as they had always lived.

What an opportunity these people missed, unwilling to submit to Christ in a life of faith and trust. There are others like them mentioned in the Bible. Jesus warned in Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife." She was guilty of the same error as these professed disciples, having possessed spiritual privileges, yet turned her face from God.

The Apostle Paul wrote of Demas, who "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas gave

evidence of being a follower of Christ for awhile, but the appeal of the world was too strong, so he went back. Some have asked, "Is it possible for one who is soundly converted to backslide?" Yes, very definitely so. I think all who know the Lord experience occasional backsliding. But the backslider does not stay in a state of retreat. It is not long before, in the providence of God, he is back in fellowship with the Lord. Hypocrites, or mere pretenders, as these people were of whom John spoke, were never really converted. They were not backsliders, for they had never submitted themselves to Christ.

After the many pseudodisciples forsook Jesus, our Lord turned to the original twelve: "Will ye also go away?" Jesus knew what His disciples would do. The purpose of His question was to bring them to a greater determination in their faith, to make a renewed commitment.

Sometimes, because of circumstances, one's own faith can be shaken. But this can be overcome as we make a fresh commitment to Christ. This is what Peter did. "Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Peter was convinced in his heart that Jesus was the Son of God: "And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." It mattered not what the actions of others were, Peter had no doubts.

Following Peter's clear-cut testimony, our Lord made a heartrending disclosure. "Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve." How surprised the disciples must have been to hear these words. They must have looked at each other in utter amazement, thinking, who could it be? The Apostle John in writing this Gospel tells us that it was Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. But at the time, the disciples did not know that.

The word "chosen" as used here refers to the position of being one of the twelve. It certainly does not mean that Judas was "chosen" in the sense of being a possessor of eternal life. Jesus called him a devil; a devil is not a Christian. James tells us, "The devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). The word

“believe” as used in this verse means “to know.” They know that Jesus is the Son of God. Likewise, they know the consequences of not believing on Christ. Judas was a devil in the sense that he was a ready tool and instrument of the wicked one. When the time came for the betrayal of Christ, Judas, because of his unbelief, became the means through which the devil worked: “The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him” (John 13:2).

There is nothing quite as dangerous as a false profession. How we need to heed the words of Peter: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

How can one test his profession? Some might feel that it is living the Christian life. I do not think Judas lived differently from the other disciples. Probably for this reason the other disciples could not detect that he was “the devil” of whom Jesus spoke. How did Judas differ from the others? Nothing appears in Scripture that would even suggest that he was a witness for Christ. The other disciples witnessed, but Judas had nothing to say in defense of Christ on any occasion. This provides a good test to determine the false from the true. Those guilty of a false profession will not be known to bear testimony for Christ. They may live like Christians, but they will not speak as do real, born-again men and women of God. By their silence, they deny Christ. If one has experienced a sincere encounter with Christ whereby he truly acknowledges Jesus as Saviour and Lord, he will not be able to keep quiet. Judas was a pretender. Peter was a disciple, willing and ready to speak for Christ at any time.

## 7

## THE GREAT DIVIDER

*John 7:1-13*

"After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him." Approximately six months elapsed between the events of chapter 6 and chapter 7. John skips over the events of those six months, many of which can be found readily in the other Gospels.

The word "Jewry" as used here comes from the same word as "Judea," found in verse 3. Even though the hour of our Lord's death was appointed, this was no reason to ignore caution and care. Those who were desirous of killing Christ were not the people in general but the Jewish authorities. Mark tells us that the "common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37).

"The Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand." This was the last of seven outstanding events in the Jewish ecclesiastical year, held in the fall following harvest, in the seventh month. "His brethren therefore said unto Him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest." How inconsiderate this was on the part of these men, dictating to the Son of God, the possessor of all wisdom. From our Lord's subsequent reply it is obvious that there was no spiritual discernment whatsoever in this appeal.

The brothers said further, "For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou do these things, shew Thyself to the world." It is possible the brothers were quoting a familiar proverb: "If a man desires to be known openly, his works should not be done in secret." Also, one can detect a bit of sarcasm in their request.

These were unkind words spoken by those who were living

and working with our Lord, but the explanation is found in the next verse. "For neither did His brethren believe in Him." Was it possible that our Lord's own brothers who had lived with Him and worked with Him could doubt that He was the Son of God, that those who had seen His mighty miracles could question His deity? Not only was it possible, it was actually a fact. Until after His resurrection His own brothers refused to place reliant faith in Christ. This situation is not uncommon, for many of us have known men of God, zealous for the Lord, whose closest kin refused to share in their "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1).

Christ replied to His brethren, "My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready." What He meant was, the will of God is meaningless to the unconverted soul. If our Lord's brothers believed not, it would have made no difference when they went to Jerusalem, for they would have been in no danger. The unsaved can fit in with the general scheme of things, for they are on the broad road that leadeth to destruction, which is crowded with others of like temperament and interest.

Furthermore our Lord said, "The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." The world will not hate one of its own kind and number, for birds of a feather flock together. The man outside of Christ finds satisfaction in the world. But our Lord was hated and despised by people of the world, "Because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."

Christ gave the disciples the option of going to Jerusalem as they wanted to. "Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for My time is not yet full come. When He had said these words unto them, He abode still in Galilee." This suggests the free will God has given every creature. He will not force us into anything, but He lovingly and graciously invites us to put first things first and to follow in His chosen paths.

After He had given the disciples the liberty of going to Jerusalem, they hastened on their way. Later Christ also made the journey to the capital city. "But when His brethren were gone up, then went He also up unto the feast, not openly, but

as it were in secret." We are not told how much time elapsed before our Lord journeyed to Jerusalem. Possibly our Lord's purpose in going in secret was to allay any publicity or notoriety that might be stimulated. There was a large segment of people anxious to make Him a king. Thus it was imperative that our Lord make this journey in secret.

"Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, Where is He?" It is obvious that they expected Christ at the feast of tabernacles, for He had formerly appeared on such occasions. Doubtless it was the rulers and Pharisees who were looking for Him, for they "sought to kill Him."

"There was much murmuring among the people concerning Him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but He deceiveth the people." Even though there was much talk in favor of Christ, we read, "Howbeit no man spake openly of Him for fear of the Jews." Many would have openly avowed their allegiance to Christ, but for fear, they remained silent. Fear of others is a mighty force. Even some of the Jewish leaders believed, but for fear, they did not declare their belief. It was said of them in John 12:42-43, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

## THE ASTOUNDING TEACHER

*John 7:14-24*

"Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught." This would be the fourth day. Christ went to one of the places reserved for teachers in the outer court of the Temple and began to teach. It was here that the Jews listened

to the various teachers. If not pleased with one, they would move along to another.

What our Lord taught, we are not told. Whatever it was, His listeners were amazed, "The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" The Jews in our Lord's audience were astounded by His knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, realizing that He had never attended one of their theological schools. Little did they realize that standing before them was the Author of the Old Testament Scriptures which they had sought to master. No wonder our Lord astonished His audience.

Jesus replied, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." The word "doctrine" is really the word for "teaching." Christ's teaching was from God the Father. Most of the teachers the people had been listening to were advancing some personal philosophy. What Jesus had to say was not the thinking of any man; it was truth from God.

"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." Here we find the natural order for the understanding of truth: "If any man will *do* . . . he shall *know*." "To know," we must "do." So many try to reverse this procedure, thinking it is "knowing" and then "doing." "Do" suggests a willingness to know and receive the truth. If one is sincerely concerned about acquiring truth for his own spiritual edification and growth, God says that one "shall know." David declared in Psalm 36:9, "In Thy light shall we see light." As one opens his heart to the light of truth, God will give light.

"The Lord Jesus said, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but He that seeketh His glory that sent Him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him." What Christ had to say brought no honor to Himself. He was humble in every respect, glorifying the Father who had sent Him.

"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill Me?" Moses had given the children of Israel the law and the Jews were glorying in this fact. Yet there was not a single person who ever kept the law

perfectly until Christ came. The Jewish leaders had falsely accused Christ of breaking the law and wanted to kill Him for it. Rightfully, they deserved to die, for they had broken the law on numerous occasions.

There was an immediate response from the audience. "The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill Thee?" Obviously this reply came from the common people who had gathered from all directions for the feast of tabernacles. They knew nothing of the intent on the part of the leaders in Jerusalem to kill Christ. To them such a question as that asked by our Lord seemed ridiculous.

Our Lord clarified their thinking, however, by saying, "I have done one work, and ye all marvel." He referred to the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda. For thirty-eight years this man had suffered, and Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day. For some time the Jewish leaders had been trying to find fault with Christ. Because He healed the man on the Sabbath, they accused Him of being a Sabbath-breaker. The Fourth Commandment does not prohibit deeds of mercy and kindness on the Sabbath day. But in spite of this, they were so legalistic and pharisaical that they readily accused our Lord.

Christ revealed their inconsistency, saying, "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the father;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man." Circumcision was a deed of mercy, and it was only natural for it to be performed on the Sabbath day. "If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at Me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?" Is it any worse to heal a man's body on the Sabbath day than it is to circumcise a child?

Christ climaxed this argument, saying, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." In other words, "Do not form conclusions on the basis of what you like or want to believe, but examine the matter with an open mind in the light of the teaching of God's Word." The Jewish leaders were not doing this. They hated Christ because of the popularity He was gaining and that which they were losing. "The com-

mon people heard Him gladly," we are told in Mark 12:37. On every hand, Jews were becoming His followers. The leaders were becoming more and more incensed because of the jealousy within their hearts. They were in no position to "judge righteous judgment."

The self-righteous Jewish leaders had closed their hearts and minds to the truth. The fact that Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath was merely an excuse to continue in their unbelief. Frequently the unsaved offer excuses as to why they have not yet trusted in the Saviour. But the tragic day is coming when their excuses will be exposed and it will be too late to do anything about their sorrowful state. To every unsaved person, the Lord Jesus says, Do not judge by "appearance" but by "righteous judgment." Search the Scriptures! Face the facts concerning eternal life, and receive Christ!

## DIVINE PROTECTION

*John 7:25-36*

"Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this He, whom they seek to kill? But, lo, He speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?"

It is obvious that those who had spoken were not the strangers to Jesus who had replied to Him in verse 20. Evidently these were some of the middle and lower classes of Jerusalem, who knew both sides. They were aware of Christ's works and also of the enmity of the leaders, and were surprised that the Jewish leaders who were present had nothing to say. Thus they asked, "Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" That is, have they finally come to the place where they have recognized Jesus as the Old Testament Messiah?

"Howbeit," they said, "we know this man whence He is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is." They were wrong in both their statements. They thought that Jesus was from Nazareth, as did most of the Jews of His day. When Christ entered Jerusalem just prior to His crucifixion, the people declared, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:11). Later an inscription was placed above Him on the cross in three languages, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). But from the Old Testament, as well as the fulfillment recorded in the New Testament, it is clear that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Certainly the Jews would have known this except for their willful ignorance.

Secondly, they said, "When Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is." Either they were ignorant or they were liars. The Old Testament clearly stated not only where Christ was to be born but how He was to be born. Because of their blindness to the truth, coupled with their increased hatred toward Christ, they were grasping for any possibility to discredit His ministry.

In response to the willful ignorance of some in His audience, the Lord Jesus cried out "in the temple as He taught, saying, Ye both know Me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not." The fact that the Lord Jesus "cried out," or more literally, "raised His voice to a high pitch," suggests that He was greatly disturbed by the attitude of His hearers. Only in four other places in the Gospels is it said that Jesus reacted in this manner. Usually His speech was quiet and reserved in tone.

"Ye both know Me, and ye know whence I am." They had the Scriptures and were familiar with the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Also, they could have easily traced His place of birth. But they did not want to believe.

Our Lord stated His relationship to the Father, and then accused His critics of not knowing God. "And I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not. But I know Him: for I am from Him, and He hath sent Me." Christ knew the Father as no one else could, being one with Him in His deity. Our Lord's statement, "I am from Him," is not to be

understood to mean that He was simply another prophet sent on a mission, but rather, in a very definite and strict sense, He was eternally a part of the Father, being the Sent-One, the Messiah who came from the presence of the Father.

Christ's statement provoked bitter anger on the part of His hearers, for it was blasphemy in their ears. "Then they sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come." Here we see the thrilling sovereignty of God at work. Some in our Lord's audience were so embittered that they wanted to arrest Christ and kill Him immediately. But by divine intervention they were restrained. They were helpless before the God of all ages.

Not all in our Lord's audience were embittered. "And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" "Believed" as used here does not mean converted. They believed in the sense that they were convinced that He was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Those who believed were not the Pharisees and chief priests but rather the common people. The question they asked was most conclusive; the angry Jewish leaders had no answer. The question implied, "Why need we wait any longer; this is, indeed, the Messiah, the Anointed One. Why not acknowledge Him as our Saviour at this moment?"

Christ's audience was divided. Some became angry and some believed after hearing Him. There must have been quite a commotion stirring. "The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning Him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him." The leaders of the Jews heard of the debating and arguing and were quick to respond by sending officers to arrest Him. But Jesus said unto them, "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me." Not only were these officers hindered by divine intervention, but they themselves listened to the teaching of our Lord. Christ was on the earth only about six months after this incident. Thus, what He said was fulfilled, "Yet a little while am I with you." He also foretold His ascension, saying, "I go

unto Him that sent Me." Then He said, "Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come."

Several things are intended here. Doubtless our Lord's words were prophetic, referring to the siege of Jerusalem. At that time, in their calamity, many Jews would realize that Christ was the Messiah, but it would be too late for help, for He would have been crucified. On the other hand, there is meaning in the words for the unsaved. For every unbeliever, *now* is the time to "seek" and "find" Christ. Tomorrow may be too late, for God says in Genesis 6:3, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." There are many carelessly neglecting the great salvation God has provided; giving little thought to eternity. They are so busy living for today that they are ignoring the claims of God on their souls.

What our Lord had to say to these officers seemed to confuse them. "Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that He said, Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?" Rarely do closed minds receive spiritual truths. It is quite obvious that these men did not want to believe. They were unwilling to consider the claims of Christ. It is obvious that the devil added to their confusion. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Yet, if one desires to know the truth, God will consider the seeking heart. One may not understand all that the Bible teaches, but if he is willing to receive Christ by believing the simple truth that Christ died for his sins and rose again, he will be eternally saved.

## RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

*John 7:37-53*

Several days elapsed.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Probably one reason why John spoke of this particular day of the feast of tabernacles as being "great" was that on this day water was drawn from the pool of Siloam by the priest, and with stirring pomp and ceremony it was carried back to the Temple and poured upon the altar before the eyes of the people. Though the exact meaning of this ceremony is not known, it is believed that it was done in remembrance of the rock that was smitten at Horeb in the wilderness, from which gushed forth the refreshing water.

Witnessing this ceremony, our Lord took His position where He could be seen by a host of people, and He shouted, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The living water was for "any man," irrespective of his background or culture, anyone who had a thirst, a spiritual desire to receive that which could truly satisfy.

When one comes to Christ and truly believes on Him, a great transformation takes place in the heart: "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" The moment one believes on Christ, the Holy Spirit makes His habitation within the believer. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." Only those who are truly saved have the Spirit within. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to live for God. He is

enabled to live a life of victory and blessing described by our Lord as "rivers of living water." As a flowing river never becomes stagnant, when the believer is controlled by the Spirit of God, his life will be joyous and fruitful.

"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet." They were thinking, of course, of the Prophet like unto Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. But, "Others said, This is the Christ." There were some who refused to recognize the Lord Jesus as the Anointed One, prophesied in the Old Testament: "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" These questions revealed the prejudice that filled the hearts of many in our Lord's day. Had they done a bit of searching, they would have discovered that Christ was born in Bethlehem as the Old Testament prophecies had declared He would be. But knowledge of the truth, though essential, is not adequate alone. There must be a heart acceptance of the Word of God if one is to be saved.

The Apostle John adds several comments concerning Christ. "There was a division among the people because of Him." This attitude toward the Saviour has continued to our day, and will prevail until Christ reigns in power on this earth. For the Lord Jesus is a divider of men. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51). Some will believe on Him; some will reject Him; not all will become His followers.

"Some of them would have taken Him; but no man laid hands on Him." Doubtless these would-be attackers were divinely restrained. No one could harm Christ until His hour came, that the perfect plan of God might be fulfilled. How clear these truths are concerning Jesus as the Son of God, the Saviour of men.

The Pharisees and chief priests had sent officers to arrest Christ because of the disturbance that was being created in the Temple (verse 32). Apparently several days passed before the officers returned to the chief priests and Pharisees. But look

what happened: "Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought Him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man." How surprised the chief priests and Pharisees must have been to receive such a response from the officers who were commissioned to arrest Christ. They were putting themselves in jeopardy before their own masters. But after having listened to Christ attentively, they were convinced that He was different from any other teacher they had ever heard. They were amazed and astounded at our Lord's words, for "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

With scorn and ridicule, the answer came from the Pharisees, "Are ye also deceived?" Feeling that they were losing the support of their own officers, the Pharisees proceeded to reason with them. "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" The Pharisees were recognized as scholars. They were also wealthy. Thus because of their knowledge and wealth, they acquired high positions. Leaning upon their reputation, they sought to argue the officers out of their convictions.

"But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." By "this people" they referred to the multitudes, the common people, who had not been privileged to attend the rabbinical schools such as the Pharisees. "Cursed" as used here was a term of scorn and contempt, used in the sense that any opinion expressed by these people was worthless and meaningless. It is easy to sense the pride displayed by the Pharisees in their attitude that only they had possession of the truth. They had knowledge, but it is obvious that they had never experienced a heart relationship to God.

The Lord has His witnesses everywhere. Suddenly a new voice was heard. "Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" It was about a year and a half after Nicodemus had come to Jesus on a night visit. It was then that this Pharisee heard of the new birth, one of the most profound truths ever to reach the ears of

man. We are not told in the third chapter of John that Nicodemus believed on Christ, but from what he says now it is very obvious that he did. Indeed, God has His witnesses on every occasion.

There have always been those who have sought to stand in the way of the testimony of the truth. But in every generation, regardless of the circumstances, God's faithful servants have arisen to the challenge of the hour to make known the name of Jesus Christ. God has said, "Ye are My witnesses" (Isaiah 43:12). Every true believer is called and appointed by God to be a witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

After Nicodemus faithfully witnessed, the Pharisees answered, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Their reply suggests that Nicodemus had said all that he could on this occasion, for his friends were embittered. But it seems, for the time being at least, that these Pharisees were silenced, for "every man went unto his own house." What more could they say? It is obvious that their satanic attack to harm the Lord Jesus was foiled because it was a battle between men and God. In such a battle, man always loses.

# 8

## THE SINFUL WOMAN

*John 8:1-11*

The closing verse of chapter seven tells us that "every man went unto his own house." But "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." Jesus had no home. Probably He spent the night in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the mountain. This to Him was a familiar place, for He resorted there quite often.

Early the next morning, Christ "came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them." Suddenly there was a shocking disturbance as a crowd of men interrupted our Lord's teaching and thrust a woman at His feet. These were "scribes and Pharisees" who had "brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery." With no regard for our Lord's teaching, they said unto Him, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?"

On the surface, the action of these men might suggest their own purity of heart and zeal for holiness. But the Gospel writer reveals their true motive: "This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him." If our Lord should acquit the woman, His enemies could accuse Him of breaking the law of God. For the law declared in Deuteronomy 22:22-24 that she should be stoned to death. If, on the other hand, Christ should condemn the woman, then He could have been arrested on the ground of interfering with Roman law, for the Romans had taken from the Jews the right of capital punishment.

This was a scheme on the part of the Jews to inveigle the Lord Jesus into saying the wrong thing. For if the "woman was

taken in adultery, in the very act," where was the man? The same law that condemned the woman also states "that they shall both of them die."

How did our Lord react to this situation? "Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not." We are not told what our Lord wrote on the ground. Whatever it was, it did not satisfy the angry mob, for "they continued asking Him." They were determined to have an answer. Thus our Lord "lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." In His Sermon on the Mount, our Lord had said, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:2-5). Knowing the hypocrisy of the woman's accusers, Christ made a practical application of these words. God is opposed to all sin. In His eyes, hypocrisy is equally as serious as adultery. Not only was the condemned woman guilty, but her accusers were guilty as well.

Those standing before the Lord Jesus Christ thought they could excuse themselves by pointing their finger at the helpless woman. But our Lord, knowing their hardness of heart, said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Some Bible scholars think that "sin" used here has reference to the specific sin for which the men were condemning the woman. This was a very common evil. Jesus described the Jews of His day as "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39). Further in His teachings Christ made it clear that this sin was committed not only by the physical act but by the thoughts as well. "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Since this is God's standard, who then is not guilty? Thus the result would have been the same if our Lord had said, "He that is without

*this same sin* among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Following His surprising statement, our Lord stooped to write on the ground again. "Being convicted by their own conscience," the accusers began to leave, "one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." The conscience, the voice of the Godlikeness in man, began to work. Soon, "Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." Of course, the audience that had been listening to our Lord's teaching prior to the interruption remained, but every one of the woman's accusers left the scene.

Then our Lord, looking at the woman said, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" In her shame she lifted her head, and said, "No man, Lord." She gave Christ all due honor because she recognized Him as the One He truly was, calling Him "Lord." Aware of her own sinfulness, she, too, might have left the scene as did her accusers. But she must have realized that Christ could help. Doubtless she saw in Jesus Christ thoughtfulness and tenderness she had never known in anyone before.

"Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." If the witness of her accusers was true, and it would seem that it was, then this woman deserved to be condemned. According to the law of Moses, she should have been stoned. But standing before her was One greater than Moses. Not only was He the giver of the law but the provider of the grace that supersedes the law. What mercy, what love, is revealed in these words, "Neither do I condemn thee."

Before our Lord said, "Neither do I condemn thee," the woman called Him "Lord." Not everyone who calls Christ "Lord" is converted. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). There are

many who call Christ Lord but are hypocrites. On the other hand, if one calls upon Him earnestly, believing in Him as Lord of all, it is certain that all condemnation as the result of sin will be removed forever.

Our Lord was concerned that this woman's experience might be lasting. Thus He said, "Go, and sin no more." There is no way of telling what this woman's life was like after she left the presence of our Lord. Yet things must have been different. She must have been a "new creation" from which old things had passed away and all things had become new.

## THE TRUE LIGHT

*John 8:12-20*

Christ resumed His teaching in the Temple by saying, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." It would seem that the sunlight was shining brightly upon those who were standing in the presence of Christ. As our Lord did frequently, He spoke in terms that people could understand easily by using objects that were familiar to all: what the sun was to the earth, the Son of God is to sinners. As the sun illuminates the world, banishing darkness, so the Son of God illuminates the minds and hearts of men, banishing the darkness of sin.

Our Lord declared, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "Followeth" as used here means *to believe*. Even more than that, it means *to walk* in God's chosen paths. There are some who say they believe on Christ, but they walk contrary to their belief. One who sincerely believes on Christ as the Light of the World will "walk in the light, as [Christ] is in the light" (1 John

1:7). There are two things we must do with the gospel of Christ—believe it and behave it. If a man is soundly converted, he will not only believe in his heart, but follow the Lord with his feet. As the sheep follow the shepherd, the servant the master, the soldier his commanding officer, so the believer should follow Christ in everything.

If salvation were merely belief on our part, we would be as helpless to abstain from sin after conversion as we were before. But God gives the believer "the light of life." There is a close affinity between light and life. Christ, who is the Light of the World, imparts His life to enable us to follow in His steps. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). Christ's sheep follow Him, not in their own strength but in the strength He gives. This is eternal life, never to be taken from us. But more than that, it is the life of God Himself.

Upon hearing our Lord's declaration, the Pharisees in His audience offered some resistance: "Thou bearest record of Thyself; Thy record is not true." Without grounds for their accusations, they alleged that Christ was an unfaithful and an untrustworthy witness.

But our Lord had a ready reply for the censure of the Pharisees. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go." These blinded Pharisees were ignorant of the Old Testament prophecies and rebellious to the truth. The Lord Jesus knew that He had come from the glory of Heaven to be born of a virgin, to live and die, and to be raised again to return to the presence of His Father. The Pharisees did not know this, nor did they want to know.

Christ went on to say, "Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man." The Pharisees were known for their harsh and stern judgment. This our Lord said was because of their carnal natures. They judged merely out of appearances without any

love or concern for the ones being judged. Doubtless our Lord was referring to the incident that had just taken place when the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman that had been taken in the act of adultery.

Christ's judgment was not like the Pharisees', for His was judgment based upon the knowledge of God. It was not selfish or cruel, but thoughtful and kind. His present ministry was not one of judgment. At His second coming He would come as a judge, but presently "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). He came to be the Saviour, though He would come again to be the Judge.

Christ also reminded the Pharisees that if it were necessary for Him to proffer judgment, this was His prerogative. "And yet if I judge, My judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me." If Jesus were to judge, it would not be erroneous or false judgment, for in all things He worked in perfect harmony with the mind of the Father. Previously He had declared, "I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me" (John 5:30). There was never a thought nor an act on the part of the Lord Jesus that was not in perfect agreement with the will of His Father.

The Lord Jesus reminded His hearers of an important fact in the law with which they were familiar. "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true." He spoke of the law as *your* law. This was not to suggest that He did not obey it, for He came not "to destroy the law . . . but to fulfil" it (Matthew 5:17). Christ said this because the Pharisees professed to be authorities in the law of God. "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true." He continued by saying, "I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me." Thus Christ fulfilled the law perfectly, in that there were two witnessing to the truth, the Father and the Son.

The undiscerning Pharisees did not understand. Thus with

scorn and bitterness they cried out, "Where is Thy Father?"

Our Lord replied, "Ye neither know Me, nor My Father: if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also." This was a sharp rebuke to the Pharisees who had boasted of their knowledge of God, and professed to be authorities on God. Christ revealed that with all of their boasted intelligence and learning, they had no knowledge of God whatsoever. Was not this a strange accusation? Not when you consider the teaching of the infallible Word of God! Throughout the Scriptures we are told that there is only one way of salvation. "And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). Salvation is through believing in Jesus Christ the Son of God. The Bible states, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). To be saved, one must be "in Christ Jesus"; there is no other way. Likewise, there can be no true knowledge of God the Father unless one has come first of all to the Son. This is the great fact Christ presented to the Pharisees: "If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also."

There are thousands who are like the Pharisees. They speak of God. Many even pray to Him. They may know of Him as a far-off Majesty who brought the world into existence, but they know nothing of Him as the Redeemer, the Provider, the Guide, the Keeper, and the many other wonderful things He is to all those who put their faith and trust in His Son. One of these days they will have to stand before this eternal God in judgment. Had they only given heed to the Scriptures and acknowledged Christ as Saviour and Lord! How tragic that men and women go through life ignoring that of greatest importance!

"These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as He taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on Him; for His hour

was not yet come." They wanted to lay their hands on Him. They were incensed. They were angered by what Christ said. But again, they were divinely restrained and unable to touch the Son of God. How assuring it is to know that God's merciful hand protects His own at all times. As He cared for the Son, He cares for you and for me. He promises in Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye." What have we to fear? Why should we be disturbed by needless worry and care? Since the eye of God is upon us, you may be sure we shall be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

## THE WAY MADE CLEAR

*John 8:21-30*

There seems to be a lapse of time at this point. What our Lord had to say next is an altogether new discourse. He began by making it unmistakably clear that, if one were not saved during this life, there would be no hope for salvation after death. "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come." "Again" reminds us that this was not the first time Christ expressed this important truth. In John 7:34 He said, "Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come." This is another of the repeated warnings God gives to those who reject or neglect the truth.

Our Lord spoke of His death and the death of His hearers. "I go My way," He said. It was not long until the Jews condemned Him to die on the cross. But we are assured that His death on the cross had been planned in the counsels of God from all eternity. This was not the way of the Jews in regard to Christ but, Jesus said, "My way." The cross was not an ac-

cident but an incident in the eternal plan of God.

After our Lord's death, the Jews would continue to seek for the Messiah, but in vain. Here is a remarkable prophecy continuing in its fulfillment. Thousands of Jews all over the world are still looking for their Messiah, without the hope and peace of God, only to die without a saving knowledge of Him.

Our King James version renders Christ's words as, "Ye shall die in your sins." The original, however, does not use the plural but rather "sin," probably referring to the sin of unbelief which bars men and women from Heaven. To anyone who refuses to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, His words are still applicable, "Whither I go, ye cannot come."

"Then said the Jews, Will He kill Himself? because He saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come." They were blind in their unbelief. Thinking Jesus to be a mad man, they thought He would hasten to take His life.

Christ said, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." Christ is the only person who has ever walked upon this earth who could say, "I am from above . . . I am not of this world." Yet, in a very special sense those who become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ should evidence the characteristics of Him that is from above. True saints of God who have been born of the Spirit should be in the world but not of it.

Our Lord reminded His hearers again of the seriousness of their unbelief. "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." A literal rendering of Christ's words is, "If ye believe not that *I am*, ye shall die in your sins." Point-blank our Lord informed His critics that He was the great "*I Am*" that had appeared to Moses in the ages past; "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14). "*I AM*" was a name with which every Jew was familiar. Again the Lord Jesus declared that He was the eternal God.

Christ's statement aroused the ire of His hearers even more as they asked, "Who art Thou?" This was not a sincere inquiry on their part, but rather a further vent for their anger, as if they asked, "What are you saying? Are you being so ridiculous to claim that you lived in Moses' day?"

Quickly our Lord answered them, "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." He had declared Himself to be the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Light of the World. What more evidence did they need?

Our Lord said, "I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him." There were many things Christ could have said that would have exposed the hypocrisy and inconsistency of those who professed to be followers of God, but He did not come for that purpose. He came to bring the message of God to lost and dying men. He came to make known the message He had received from the Father. In using the pronoun "Him," the Jews "understood not that He spake to them of the Father." They could not perceive that this very Jesus who was standing in their presence could have come from the Father. Though He had proved Himself by His miracles and His spotless character, they refused to believe.

Once again, Christ told of His coming death on the cross. "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." After His crucifixion, the Jews would know without question that Jesus had come from God. He did not say they would believe, but simply that they would be convinced. Many were convinced. After witnessing the miracles that took place at the crucifixion, the darkness and the earthquake, but even greater, the miracle of the resurrection, many understood then that Jesus was more than a mere human. But the sorrowful part of it was that though they

were convinced, they were not converted. This is a most tragic situation; to know in one's heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and yet to do nothing about it.

The Son at no time lived in contradiction to the will of the Father. Likewise, when one truly believes on Christ, he will desire to "do always those things that please Him." For one to say he believes, while walking contrary to the teachings of Christ, is to live a lie. Jesus said, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). When one truly believes on Christ, he becomes a disciple of Christ. Discipleship has to do with discipline.

As Christ "spake these words, many believed on Him." It would seem that this was mere head belief. What our Lord said afterward instructed them as to the nature of true belief. How pitiful it is to see people possessing a knowledge of Christ but neglecting to make any actual commitment to Him. Yet, this is so commonplace. People know that Jesus is the Son of God. Many are familiar with the simple truths that are taught in the Word of God. But they have never actually come to the place of submission, claiming Christ as their own personal Saviour and Lord.

### WHO IS YOUR FATHER?

*John 8:31-45*

The Lord Jesus made it clear that an expression of one's belief is not necessarily conversion: there is also something else to be considered. "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed." True belief will stand the test of time. Some are stirred emotionally by a touching story or a forceful preacher. Readily they respond to an invitation. They "feel so good." For several weeks or months they discontinue certain practices. But it is not long before they

revert to their old ways and feel as they always did. It is obvious that they were not truly converted. It is not only the beginning of the Christian life that provides the proof of conversion but the continuing in the way of the Lord. To walk in the way of the Lord is to obey Him and to live in the light of the truth of the Scriptures. In 1 John we read, "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

When one truly believes on the Saviour and yields his life to Christ's control, he will enter into the freedom which God has provided for His people. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is obvious that our Lord meant Himself when He spoke of "the truth." He is "the way, the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). It is Christ who provides eternal freedom from the bondage of sin. When one knows Christ, he is not only delivered from the guilt of sin but from its power. "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). This, of course, refers to any sin, regardless of its potency, for "the blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanseth us from *all* sin" (1 John 1:7).

The Jews to whom Jesus was speaking were extremely proud. They rebelled at Christ's intimation of their bondage, saying, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free?" How ridiculous was this reply. Ever since Babylon, the Jews had been in subjection to one power after another, and even as the Lord Jesus spoke to them, they were under the bondage of Rome.

Far worse than their slavery to a political power was their slavery to sin. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." Sin is a hard taskmaster. "The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15).

"And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever." The Jews were quite familiar with the letter of the law, but they knew nothing of the life and liberty to be found in Christ. Thus, again He tells them that they

will perish in their way. But, if they believed in Him, they would have eternal life because "the Son abideth ever."

Not only would they become possessors of eternal life, but of a liberty they had never known. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Only Christ can provide this freedom. Good intentions, church attendance, baptism, cannot possibly provide new life. The word "indeed" used here means "really" or "truly." The freedom Christ provides from sin and lust is truly freedom.

The Jews had boasted that they were of Abraham's seed. The Lord Jesus said, "I know . . . ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath no place in you." How different these Jews were from their father Abraham. He had anticipated the coming of Christ, realizing, as God had said, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). But instead of following Abraham in this respect, even though they claimed him as their father, they wanted to murder Christ because they refused to believe the truth which He taught.

Our Lord became very pointed: "I speak that which I have seen with My Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father," sharply contrasting, "My Father . . . your father." This must have been a stinging rebuke to them. Later in this discussion, our Lord made clear to them who their father actually was.

"They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father." But our Lord put the test to them immediately, saying, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Children usually bear the characteristics of their parents. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). True belief in God is always evidenced by works that honor Him.

Our Lord pointed out their inconsistency, saying, "But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." Murder was not one of Abraham's works, nor is it a work of God. Neither did Abraham reject the truth of God as they had

done. He was a believer, and with great love he evidenced this fact. With their spirit of hatred evidenced in their desire to kill Jesus, it was obvious that these Jews were not living in the spirit of Abraham.

Having prepared them for the next statement, Jesus declared, "Ye do the deeds of your father." Of course, Christ meant that their father was the devil. But they retorted, "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." Again they were claiming to be a covenant people, descendants of Abraham and, for this reason, children of God. They overlooked the fact that even though the Jews were the chosen people, there had to be a personal relationship with the Lord. They claimed the covenant privilege without the individual responsibility.

The Lord Jesus said, "If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me." The same is true in our day, if one does not love Christ, he is not a child of God. The Bible teaches this repeatedly. The question the Lord Jesus asked Peter was not, "Are you a faithful attendant at church? Do you give your tithes to the work of God? Do you do the best you can?" His question was unmistakably clear, "Lovest thou *Me*?"

Jesus asked a question and then gave the answer, "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word." The words "ye cannot hear" literally are "ye will not hear" or "ye refuse to hear." "Word" as used here means doctrine or truth taught. This seemed to be a constant problem among our Lord's Jewish listeners. When he spoke of the Bread of Heaven, they understood Him to mean literal bread to eat. When He spoke of the freedom He could give, they thought of political freedom. And when he reminded them of their father, they concluded that He meant Abraham. Thus, they did not understand His speech because they refused to believe in Him.

Our Lord next revealed who their father actually was. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye

will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." This statement is important not only because of the rebuke it carries for our Lord's critics, but it provides important teaching on the doctrine of the devil. Many think of the devil as merely a power or force. But our Lord made it clear that he is a distinct personality: "he" was a murderer from the beginning.

The devil "abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." The devil, like the rest of God's creation, was created good. But the devil "abode not in the truth." He fell from his high and lofty estate and turned his face from the holiness and righteousness of God. Ever since his fall, he has sought to delude men and women and turn them from the truth of God. We are told that our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Few there are who realize what a real and mighty enemy we have in the world's greatest deceiver.

Our Lord declared, "And because I tell you the truth, ye believe Me not." Since they were children of the devil, who was a liar, they were naturally opposed to Christ and the truth. What a sorrowful tragedy—they had the Son of God in their presence, but they refused to believe Him.

### SHALL NEVER DIE

*John 8:46-59*

To further evidence His stand for the truth, Christ asked two questions, which no one in His audience could answer. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" "Convinceth" means *to convict*.

Since those with whom our Lord was speaking rejected Him as a teacher of truth, surely they must have thought He was guilty of some evil. Thus, He boldly asked, "Which of you [convicteth] Me of sin?" If Christ were a deceiver, then it would follow that what He taught was error.

There was no response to our Lord's question regarding sin. He is the only One in the history of civilization who could truthfully say, "I have no sin." Since the source was sinless, what He taught had to be truth. "And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?"

Christ reminded His hearers again that they were children of the devil. For had they been children of God, their response to the truth would have been favorable. "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." This verse provides clear insight as to why so many people have such little concern for the Word of God. Like the Jews to whom Christ was speaking, they have never really met God Himself. Consequently, they will have no interest in what He says. If a man loves God with all his heart, and if he knows the Lord through personal experience, you may be sure he will love and respect the truth God has spoken. David exclaimed, "O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). Prior to that he had declared in Psalm 116:1, "I love the LORD."

The Jews became more and more incensed. What Jesus had just said should have silenced them, but they were not willing to give up. Unable to answer His questions, they threw names at Him, a sign of certain defeat. "Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, thus they were using a term of reproach and contempt. Further they accused Christ of being demon-possessed. The word "devil" as used in this verse is really the word "demon."

Christ answered, "I have not a devil; but I honor My Father, and ye do dishonor Me." He ignored being called a

Samaritan, but to their other accusation He replied that He honored God the Father, which a demon could never do. In all that Christ said or did he gave due respect and glory to the Father. It was as He said, "I seek not Mine own glory," adding, "there is one that seeketh and judgeth." The Father, the true Judge, sought the glory of the Son.

Jesus in clear and certain terms stated, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." This, of course, does not mean physical death. Christians die, as well as the unsaved, though a Christian's death is far different from that of the unbeliever. The sting of death has been removed for the child of God. But our Lord's reference here is to the second death that comes most surely to all who refuse to believe on Christ. It is the death spoken of in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death." It is the death that continues throughout all eternity for the unbeliever, following his physical death. It is to be eternally separated from God and to live forever in the horrors of hell.

Our Lord's hearers refused to receive Christ's statement. In fact, they became even more severe in their criticism, stating, "Now we know that Thou hast a devil . . . Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death." It is obvious from their misstatement of Christ's words that they had interpreted them in the light of the physical rather than the spiritual. Christ had said, "He shall never see death." The Jews said, "He shall never *taste* of death." How blind the unbelieving mind is to the truth. The critics in our Lord's audience claimed that the father of the Jews, Abraham, was dead. Likewise, all the prophets die. Thus, according to them, Christ's teaching was ridiculous.

Two questions were thrust at our Lord. "Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself?" For the moment our Lord ignored the first question, but in answer to the second He said, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing: it is My Father that honoreth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your

God." The Son never honored Himself. He came to glorify the Father. The One these Jews professed to love was the One who glorified Christ. If they truly loved God, they should have loved Christ. But, declaring their hypocrisy, Jesus said, "Ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know Him, and keep His saying." Had the Jews kept His saying, they would have received the words of Christ and believed on Him.

The Lord Jesus then answered their other question: "Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad." Like all the Old Testament prophets, Abraham saw the Lord Jesus through the eye of faith. Abraham must have seen the day of Christ in the substitutionary sacrifice God provided to deliver his son Isaac. As Abraham looked for Christ's day, he "was glad."

The Jews were shocked at our Lord's statement. Quickly they replied, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" It is believed that Jesus was about thirty-three years of age at this time. "Not yet fifty" suggests that Jesus must have looked much older than He actually was. Doubtless the trials and severe testings which He had experienced gave Him this appearance.

Perhaps you have noticed how careless the Jews were in listening to what Christ had to say. Could it have been that they were so angry that it was difficult for them to hear? Christ had not said that He had seen Abraham. Rather, it was just the opposite. Christ had said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day." When one is angry, he is usually unreasonable.

"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Here clearly and distinctly our Lord speaks of His preexistence. Our Lord was more than man. He was the eternal Messiah, of whom the Prophet Micah had written, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

Christ is "the same yesterday . . . today, and forever"

(Hebrews 13:8). He is never, "I was," but always, "I AM." What consolation this provides for those who are called to drink of bitter waters. Our Lord is near to help. He understands our calamities because He lives in the present. We weep and worry; we wish we could be delivered from our present sufferings. But, never forget it, He is with us and in His own time He will provide deliverance.

The Jews became more incensed than ever. "Then took they up stones to cast at Him." But they could not harm Him. "Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." His hour had not come. No man could touch Him until the divine appointment permitted.

# 9

## THE BLIND MAN HEALED

*John 9:1-12*

In this chapter we find one of the best attested miracles of Scripture. Not only do we read the testimony of the one upon whom the miracle was performed, but that of his parents and friends, as well as the reluctant Pharisees. The evidence was examined from every possible angle and the proof was unquestionable.

It would appear that this miracle was performed immediately following the events of the previous chapter. Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Temple. "And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth." We are not told that the man sought Jesus but rather that Jesus saw the man.

Having their attention drawn to the blind man because of our Lord's interest, the disciples asked a question that had probably disturbed them on many occasions. "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" If the man was born blind, how could the blindness be the result of His sin? It is hardly probable that they believed that humans lived in a preexistent state. There was, however, a common notion among many Jews that it was possible for an infant to sin before he was born. The example is often cited of Jacob who took hold of his brother Esau's heel in the womb. The disciples' question seemed to suggest the age-old problem of the origin of suffering.

"Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents." This was not to suggest that neither the blind man nor his parents were sinners. But this particular blindness was for a greater pur-

pose—"that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

The Lord Jesus went on to say, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." Not only was this man's blindness to be useful as a manifestation of the power of God as revealed in Christ, but it was to be a reminder to the disciples of the urgency of fulfilling their sacred obligation of service to God. Christ declared, "*I must.*" He had a divine compulsion to do the work of the Father. For this reason He *saw* the blind man. Christ visualized the man's need, not only of physical sight, but spiritual. Doubtless the disciples would have passed this man by, as you and I have also passed by needy lives. But our Lord with His heart of compassion and love was constrained to stop and minister to this helpless soul.

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." The man born blind from birth was in darkness, but Christ came to provide light. How it must have cheered the heart of the blind man to hear these words. Doubtless he had heard of Jesus in terms of the Messiah, the Saviour, the Sent One from God, but now here was good news—Christ is light. What could one in physical darkness desire more than light?

Following His encouraging statement, our Lord "spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." Since the Jews believed there were medicinal qualities in spittle, an act such as Jesus performed would be breaking the Sabbath. But Jesus "anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."

The man responded immediately. "He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing." What a happy day this must have been for the man born blind.

The man could have been healed without the clay and spittle. He who is the light of the world, who centuries before had said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3), could also have healed by a simple word. But the Lord deals with individuals differently. He works in

mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. That of greatest importance is obedience. Christ said to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." The man obeyed and the result was that he "came seeing." Obedience to the plan of God brought happiness.

Spiritual well-being is found in obedience to the plan of God. Without question, if the blind man had not responded with willing obedience he would not have been cured of his malady. Sometimes we turn from the path of obedience, feeling that the cost is too great. It may mean the breaking of a friendship or the forsaking of a particular sin or many other things. But consider the cost of not obeying God. The Bible lists scores of tragedies resulting from disobedience. Many of us have seen them in real life. God says in 1 Samuel 15:22, "To obey is better than sacrifice."

We might wonder why the blind man was sent to the pool of Siloam. Why not to another of the dozens of pools that were nearby? Siloam means "Sent." The Lord Jesus was known as the Sent One. Seventeen times in the first nine chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to by this title. Was it not significant that the Lord Jesus instructed the blind man to wash in the pool known as "Sent"? As he made his way to the pool, would he not think of the Sent One? Would he not realize that the One who said, "Go, to the pool called Sent" was also the Sent One from God?

There can be no question about the fact that the blind man experienced a miracle of God, for "The neighbors therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?" There were two groups of people here, his neighbors who knew him well and those who had seen him frequently begging for alms at the temple gate. His neighbors who knew him best of all declared, "This is he." Others who had seen him begging for alms day after day said, "He is like him." They were not convinced that this was the same man they had seen frequently as a blind man. But the blind man himself declared, "I am he."

The observers asked, "How were thine eyes opened?" Honestly and sincerely the answer came, "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight." Though the steps leading up to the miracle were given by the healed man, he was unable to tell how the actual miracle took place. It is impossible for anyone to explain a miracle.

The miracle of the healing of the blind man is a type of the healing of the spiritual eyes that takes place when one comes to Christ. It is possible to tell where we were and what we did, but it is impossible to explain how our spiritual blindness was removed and how our lives were transformed. But like the man born blind from birth who said, "I received sight," the true believer can say the same. How one who has been walking on the broad road leading to destruction is transformed instantly and becomes desirous of walking on the narrow road that leads to life everlasting, no one can fully explain. But those who have entered into this relationship with God through Christ know the reality of this experience.

Those who had been interrogating the blind man asked, "Where is He?" The reply was, "I know not." It would seem that the desire to know the whereabouts of Christ was not for a good purpose. In all probability, there were some Pharisees in the crowd who were still looking for an occasion to condemn Him. Here was a perfect set-up. Again Christ had healed on the Sabbath day. But Christ being God and knowing all that would transpire, was not to be found by His accusers.

One thing is sure however; we know where He is now. He is at the right hand of God the Father Almighty and He can be reached by any who have humbled themselves in His sight and acknowledged Him as Saviour and Lord. He is ready and willing to help them and to care for all their needs. What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus, our Lord!

## UNQUESTIONABLE EVIDENCE

*John 9:13-25*

The witnesses to the healing of the blind man were astounded. Some were disturbed. "They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind." John states the problem by saying, "It was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes." To the Pharisees, this was breaking the law. But Christ did not on any occasion break the law of God. He came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. He did not, however, obey the traditions of the Pharisees, who were adding to the Scriptures and putting themselves above God.

"Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight." A straightforward answer was given. "He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see." There could be no question about the miracle. But the Pharisees accused the Lord Jesus of an infraction of the law. Rather than be grateful that the blind man was healed, they sought to find fault.

There were some, however, in the Sanhedrin who disagreed with the majority. They asked, "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?" There was a division among them. It might have been Nicodemus who raised this question, for it was he who had said to Christ some time before, "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).

The Pharisees asked the healed man, "What sayest thou of Him, that He hath opened thine eyes?" Quickly the reply came, "He is a prophet." In verse 11 he had spoken of Christ as "a man." Now he terms Him "a prophet." Such a statement took courage, for a prophet, in the thinking of the Jews, was one possessing the authority of God, usually evidencing his authority by great works and miracles, such as Elijah and Jeremiah had done.

What a lesson for those of us who have received Jesus Christ as Lord. It is not always easy to be a Christian. It takes courage to stand against sin and against the world that delights in sin. It is no simple matter to be laughed at, to be called old-fashioned or puritanical. This is one reason why so many who claim to be followers of Christ bear all the marks of the world. Though they name Christ's name, they are unwilling to follow Him.

Refusing to accept the testimony of the man who had been blind, the Sanhedrin summoned his parents. "But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?" With three questions they tried to incriminate not only the parents but the man who had been healed. His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself." To the first two questions, the parents were able to give a definite reply. The third question they refused to answer.

"These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." To "be put out of the synagogue" meant not merely to be removed from the Temple where they were being cross-examined but to be excommunicated.

There were two branches of excommunication known to the Jews. The first was for lighter offenses, of which there were twenty-four. It lasted only thirty days, and during this time the guilty one was not permitted to enter the synagogue. The second was far more serious, resulting in complete excommunication forever. One who was excommunicated permanently might even be denied the privilege of dealing with local merchants. Nothing could be more humiliating for a Jew than being excommunicated from the synagogue. It was known as "the curse" that fell on the disobedient.

"Again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner." It would seem that the Sanhedrin was finally convinced that the man born blind did experience a miracle of healing. However, they sought to disassociate Christ from the miracle. They tried to convince the healed man that Christ broke the law by healing on the Sabbath. For this reason, He was a sinner and not in a position to perform a miracle. They declared that since the miracle was performed by God, He should receive the praise. Because of their prejudice and bigotry these men would not acknowledge Jesus as God.

But notice the answer that came from the lips of the one who had experienced the miracle. "Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Clearly and pointedly he adhered to the one line of testimony he had begun, that he was healed. He was speaking not out of prejudice, nor even out of conviction. He simply witnessed to his experience.

Here is a worthwhile lesson for all of us who really know the Lord. It is God's desire that we witness to this fact. It is not necessary to have an exhaustive knowledge of the Bible. Just simply give your testimony! With love and assurance, tell others how the Lord Jesus has transformed your life, how that once you were blind in sin, but now by the grace of God, you can see. Be a witness for God!

### LORD, I BELIEVE

*John 9:26-41*

The Pharisees refused to give up. "Then said they to him again, What did He to thee? how opened He thine eyes?" Doubtless by their repetition of the same question, they were trying to confuse the man, expecting him to contradict himself so that they could accuse him and his healer. With

God-given grace he replied to their subtle efforts, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be His disciples?"

This aroused their anger more than ever, for "then they reviled him, and said, Thou art His disciple; but we are Moses' disciples." But our Lord had declared (John 5:46), "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me." Christ was no stranger to Moses, but He was to these Pharisees because of their refusal to believe.

The Pharisees declared, "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is." "Whence" as used here does not mean "place." It refers, rather, to "a commission." They knew that Moses was called and commissioned of God. Had they been willing to investigate with open minds, they would have discovered that Christ had been commissioned by the Father. "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

The healed man spoke again: "Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes." There is no question about it, the miracle had been performed. The man born blind could see. Christ must have received His authority from God the Father, for what He did was beyond the realm of a human.

The healed man continued, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth." By this it was not meant, of course, that God does not hear the prayers of lost sinners who cry out to God in repentance. The reference is to those who profess to be followers of God but who habitually live in sin. If one is "a worshipper of God," that is, if he is right with the Lord, living in obedience to God's will, the Lord will hear him. The angry Jews could not resist this argument, because it was the very thing which they

believed and taught, even though their lives did not prove it.

Next, the healed man reminded his hearers that "since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." All of them were familiar with the magicians and sorcerers, but it was well known that they were imposters.

"If this man were not of God, He could do nothing." The reasoning of the healed man far exceeded that of the learned Pharisees. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Unable to answer the arguments, but at the same time unwilling to give up, the Pharisees did what defeated men usually do, they gave vent to their anger. "They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out."

Realizing the seriousness of being cast out of the synagogue, the man born blind must have felt friendless in a strange world. But it was not for long, for we read that "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Is this not just like our wonderful Lord? We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Christ can provide an escape for any dilemma of life. The man of our text had been cast out of the synagogue, only to be cast into the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the question our Lord asked the man when He found him. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Christ had healed the physical blindness, now He returned to heal the spiritual blindness. There seemed to be a readiness and

eagerness to believe as the man asked, "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?"

The Lord Jesus answered, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." Immediately the man cried out, "Lord, I believe." And then "he worshipped Him." Falling down before the Lord Jesus he gave homage to Him as the Son of God. The man born blind became a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. Oh, what joy must have flooded his heart. Even greater than the receiving of physical eyesight was the opening of his spiritual eyes.

The Lord Jesus told him, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." This is not a contradiction of other statements our Lord made that He "came not to judge the world" (John 12:47) or that He came not "to condemn the world" (John 3:17). The meaning here seems to be that when one refuses to believe, he brings judgment upon himself. Considering the case at hand, our Lord said that He came "into this world, that they which see not might see," speaking of spiritual healing. Thinking of the Pharisees and their hardness of heart, He said He came "that they which see might be made blind." In other words, a refusal to believe results in a worse condition. The heart hardens and the possibility of belief lessens.

Recognizing our Lord's inference, "some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also?" It is obvious that some of the Pharisees had been following Him and now were listening carefully. Their question was pure sarcasm. It was as though they had said, "Do you think we who are the authorities of the law, the learned doctors, are spiritually blind?"

"Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." Because they were so confident in their self-conceits, they remained in unbelief. How many there are who like them have been kept from eternal life because of pride.

## 10

### ONLY ONE DOOR

*John 10:1-9*

There is no break between chapters 9 and 10. The Jews to whom Christ was speaking boasted of their scholarship. They had adhered strongly to tradition. But Christ made it clear that they had no relationship to God. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

There is no question as to whom was meant by "the door," for in verse 9 Christ declared, "*I am the door.*" The door for the scribes and Pharisees had been scholarship and tradition. Outwardly they had all the necessary credentials to prove their right to hold an ecclesiastical office, but inwardly they were devoid of a heart experience with God. This was proven by their attitude toward Christ. Not only did they reject His claims but they completely ignored the unmistakable evidence of His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

In essence Christ was calling the scribes and Pharisees "thieves and robbers." Definitely they were. For centuries, they had robbed the people of the truth. Sternly opposed to the miracle, they preferred legalism and tradition to the truth.

What was stated in verse 1 is now stated conversely in verse 2, "But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." There is only one entrance to truth, that is through Him who declared, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). At this point our Lord is not speaking of Himself as the shepherd; that is revealed later in the chapter. But in the first nine verses, He is presenting Himself as the door. Here the "shepherd" represents the faithful teachers of truth in contrast

to the scribes and Pharisees, those who had a distinct call from God as opposed to those in the ministry for selfish purposes.

Regarding the "shepherd" our Lord said, "To Him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." Some of the wealthy Jews employed not only a shepherd but a porter who would relieve the shepherd at night. It would seem that the porter in this parable refers to the Holy Spirit, who "openeth" the door to the shepherd and his flock. It is through the Holy Spirit that our minds and hearts are opened to Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Roman 8:9).

"And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice." As the true shepherd faithfully leads his sheep by precept and example, we are assured that the sheep will follow. Thus believers who follow their teachers in the way of truth will also be prepared to detect error. "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers."

There are many who attend our churches who are untaught and think that anything that bears the name of God is good. Such are often swept into the modern cults that deny Christ as the Son of God. They are unaware of the devil's deceptions because of their ignorance of the truth. In many cases, their ignorance is the result of having never been born again. The true child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who will lead him in the truth. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John 2:20).

"This parable spake Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them." Not only were the scribes and Pharisees spiritually blind, but they continued in their blindness, unwilling to receive the truth. But Christ did not give them up. "Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." We are reminded here of the loving patience of our Lord in dealing with unbelievers. "Then said Jesus unto them *again*." As He had done many times before, He used repetition to press home His message. So often we who are

Christ's followers get impatient in our witnessing, overlooking the fact that "it is the Spirit that quickeneth." We try to force souls to Christ. If they do not respond immediately, oftentimes we forget about them and write them off as hopeless. We need to learn to deal with the lost in patience.

Our Lord's next statement was a strong accusation. "All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them." "All" does not refer to the true teachers of God, but to the false. It cannot be said that the faithful prophets of the Old Testament were "thieves and robbers." But all through the history of the Jews there had been false shepherds, deceiving and deluding the people. God says, "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in My house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:1,11). These were false shepherds like the scribes and Pharisees to whom our Lord was speaking. They professed to have the message of God but they were representatives of the wicked one.

Not everyone followed the pernicious ways of these false teachers. He says, "the sheep did not hear them." Even in our day, amidst all the apostasy that abounds, God has His own faithful believers here and there all around the world who have remained true to the Word.

The Lord Jesus reiterates, "I am the door." There was only one door into truth. "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." This seems to be the general application of the parable. All who would be saved and possess eternal life must enter the door. As He is the Bread of Life, the Water of Life, the Light of Life, so the Lord Jesus is the Door of Life.

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*John 10:10-18*

Christ next presented Himself as the Good Shepherd. First, He contrasted the false shepherds with Himself saying, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." The false teacher peddles his religion for mere personal aggrandizement with no heart concern for his followers. Christ, on the other hand, came not to receive but to give. Thus He stated His essential purpose for coming into the world. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He is the Life Giver. Not merely life, but abundant life. This is a richer, fuller experience that knows in its completeness the power of God at work in one's heart. The man who clings to Christ as Saviour but who refuses to yield to Him as Lord knows nothing of the "abundant life."

Though our Lord was condemning the scribes and Pharisees for their lifeless religion and selfish ambitions, He was not condemning the true undershepherds of the Old Testament. In coming to bring life into the world, He was not suggesting that the Old Testament believers were unfamiliar with this life. The life Christ gives today was known from Adam to John the Baptist. Under the old covenant, men were saved by faith as they are under the new covenant. But although Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Daniel, and many others had received eternal life by faith in the promised Redeemer, naturally they had an imperfect vision of that which would be revealed fully when Christ came. It was He who abolished death and "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). Thus no excuse was acceptable under the old covenant, as no excuse is ac-

ceptable under the new covenant, to believe in Christ and be saved.

Two times in this passage our Lord declared Himself to be the "good shepherd." He said, "The good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." This language should have been familiar to the Jews. If one were a good shepherd he would have every need of his sheep in mind constantly. In contrast, He refers to the hireling who is "not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not." The hireling was merely a servant who had no special interest in the welfare of the sheep, who "seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep." This was not true of all hirelings, but our Lord was making a contrast.

Our Saviour had in mind the many in the synagogue who professed to be followers of God, but they declined to pay the price of true discipleship. In John 12:42-43 our Lord describes some of these Jews. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." These chief rulers were sincere believers, but they were kept from the "abundant life" because of their desire for personal comfort and gain. They were unwilling to sacrifice for Christ.

The Lord Jesus said that the hireling "fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep." In sharp contrast He added, "I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." What does this mean? To be sure, it means more than His knowing our names, our places of abode, our assets and liabilities; Christ knows all about our heartaches and sorrows. And because He is the *Good Shepherd*, He is desirous of helping us.

There is another marvelous truth revealed in this verse; the fellowship that exists between the Lord's own and the Lord Himself. The believer who has failed to yield to Christ's control, knows little about Him. But those who have submit-

ted to Him completely, know Him well. You will recall that the Apostle Paul's great desire was "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10). The word "know" as used here means more than an intellectual grasp of Christ. Paul was speaking of an experiential knowledge of the Saviour, desiring to know Him in all His fullness and power. Those who are not truly His, even though they may say they are, will not know Him in this respect. And He will not know them.

"As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep." We read in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Christ laid down His life for us on the cross when He paid the price for the sin of all who would believe on Him, thus delivering us from the power of sin and saving us for all eternity. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 this truth is portrayed so clearly, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Next, we are told of the conversion of the Gentiles which would soon take place. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Our Saviour made it clear that salvation was not only for the Jews but for "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9). For as God says in 1 John 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Regardless of one's past, his location, or his nationality, God says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

The "one fold" is literally "one flock." There are many ecclesiastical "folds" but only one flock—the true Church, the Body of Christ, composed of all sincere believers in Christ of every generation. One may be a member of one of the hundreds of ecclesiastical folds, but lost forever. However, if one

is a member of the Body of Christ, having been born again, he shall live forever.

"Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." Christ's life He gave as a sacrifice on the cross. Of His own volition, He laid down His life that lost and dying men might be saved. In reading of the hypocrisy of Judas, the hatred of the scribes and Pharisees, the injustice of the trial, the atrocities meted out by the Roman soldiers in the scourging, the cross, and the spear, one is tempted to feel that Christ was at the mercy of wicked men. But such was not the case. Recall His words in Matthew 26:53, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" Christ could have summoned all the angels of Heaven to His rescue, but He chose not to do it. He lived in willing obedience to the commandment of the Father.

Long before the world came into existence it was decided in the counsels of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that Christ should come to be a sacrifice on the cross. Peter in speaking to the Jews declared of Christ, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Here we see both sides of the transaction—the divine and the human. But let us not overlook the fact that it was of His own volition that Christ laid down His life that He might redeem us from hell. Thus we can be assured that the cross is God's plan, not man's. The wicked men who condemned our Saviour and placed Him on the tree at Calvary were but the instruments in the hands of Almighty God. The cross was not an accident on the part of unwise humans; it was the eternal provision on the part of an all-wise God.

**NEVER PERISH***John 10:19-30*

"There was a division . . . again among the Jews for these sayings." Long ago the Prophet Isaiah had foretold that Christ would be a divider among men, "a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense" (Isaiah 8:14).

Because "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7), it is to be expected that not all would believe on Christ. Some in the audience declared that "He hath a devil, and is mad." Thus they asked, "Why hear ye Him?" Their theory was, since He was a maniac, anything He would say would be ridiculous and unintelligible.

These outspoken Jews were rebuked in their speech, however, for "others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" Two months had passed since the blind man had been healed, but time did not erase the memory of this mighty miracle of God. The works Christ performed proved the verity of His words conclusively. Satan does possess superhuman power, and is able to perform mighty works. But what he does is never for the benefit of man, always for his detriment. Christ, on the other hand, has the welfare of others at heart, and the works He does glorify God.

The Apostle John makes a few other comments in preparation for more of our Lord's teaching, stating that "it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter." "Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch," which was covered, protecting the teachers and listeners from the cold and rain of December. Solomon's porch was a large veranda where the various teachers took their places while the crowds gathered to listen. As our Lord walked about there, some of the Jews gathered around Him and asked, "How long dost

Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."

Let us not be too sympathetic with these Jews who appeared to be sincere in their curiosity. These were avowed enemies seeking to trap our Saviour in His words. The word "doubt" expresses the thought of "being kept in suspense." Up to the present, they had not been able to find anything in our Lord's speech worthy of condemnation. They were doing their best to get Him to say something worthy of blame.

Jesus replied to them, "I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me." Here again we see divine wisdom revealed by our matchless Saviour. Repeatedly Christ had spoken in various allegories that conveyed the same truth. He had proved His words by His works. All that He did was done in unity with the Father. Either Jesus was the Messiah or an impostor. The Jews had accused Him of being an impostor, but the evidence of his Messiahship was unquestionable.

Christ declared to these unbelievers, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you." Though stated differently, it is the same truth that He taught over and over again: simply that one must believe in Him to be one with Him. Those who were interrogating Christ on Solomon's porch were not unbelievers because they had not heard the truth, nor because the truth had not been presented clearly. They were out of the fold of God because, as Jesus said, "Ye believe not."

Man misses the joy of the blessed life on this earth and Heaven to come for the simple reason that he refuses to believe on Christ.

The Lord Jesus made it clear who His "sheep" were: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Christ's sheep hear His voice. The Prophet Isaiah declared, "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). But gently and kindly our Lord pleads with us to come to Him and trust Him for eternal salvation. Those who hear Christ's voice and respond to His invitation will be known by Him. As Christ said, they will be "My sheep." They become His possession, not

merely in the sense of ownership, but He will care for them and provide for them.

But even more, the Lord Jesus declared, "They follow Me." This suggests complete dependence on the part of God's people to rest and trust in the Saviour for all things.

Perhaps you may ask, is not obedience to God a real problem? Possibly you desire to obey Him but yet find it difficult. The One who calls upon you to follow Him in obedience is the same One who declared, "I know them." He understands all about our weaknesses. He energizes us for every task so that we follow Him. In Christ we possess the power to obey Him and to do His will.

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." Who but the Son of God could make such a promise as this? He "gives" eternal life to us. It cannot be earned; it is God's free gift to all who will hear His voice and believe on Him. The Lord has not promised to supply us with wealth, or even health, but He has promised to give us that which is of supreme value—eternal life. The result of possessing eternal life is that we who are truly children of God "shall never perish." We shall never be condemned to hell. This security is so certain that Jesus could declare, "neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." The wicked one has supernatural power. But even he is powerless in his attempt to draw believers from eternal life into perdition. We are in Christ's hand.

"My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Not only are we secure in the hand of the Son of God, but in another figure we are reminded that we are also in the Father's hand. We have a double security.

This relationship between the believer, the Father, and the Son exists because of the unity of God the Son and God the Father. "I and My Father are one." Here is one of the greatest statements of deity in the Bible. Jesus did not say, "My Father and I are one," which might suggest that the Son was subservient to the Father. They are equal. They are one in essence,

holiness, power, and truth. Thus for one to declare that he knows the Father but has never believed on the Son is a contradiction to all that God has revealed in His Word. Jesus made it clear that it is through the Son that one comes to know the Father. There is no other way.

## THE UNQUESTIONABLE PROOF

*John 10:31-42*

Christ had declared, "I and My Father are one." To the Jews, this was blasphemy. Immediately they "took up stones again to stone Him." The Jews had attempted to stone Christ because of His statement, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:59). The words, "took up stones" in chapter 10 differ from the former passage. There were no stones on Solomon's porch, but these embittered Jews had "carried" stones with them to mete out judgment on Christ at the first opportunity.

"Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me?" What a searching question! Christ had asked, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" (John 8:46) Christ is the spotless Lamb of God in whom there is no blemish. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). Why then did the Jews want to stone Him? Why did Cain kill his brother Abel? "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). The Jews wanted to kill Christ for the same reason.

"For a good work we stone Thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." The Jews were not so much disturbed by the works our Lord did. They were not even aroused by Christ's claim of being the

Messiah. What provoked them was His alleged deity.

Christ is one with the Father in a sense in which no one else ever has been or ever will be. He is the Son of God, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), "the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3), that is, the Person of God the Father. Christ is very God, the eternal Saviour, one with the Father.

"Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" By law is meant the Old Testament Scriptures, and the quotation is from Psalm 82:6. God chose certain men to act as His judges. The people were to bring their questions to them. They were to act in the capacity of God. Though they were humans, because of their wisdom, they were spoken of as gods. Our Lord said, "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

Not one jot or tittle of Scripture can be changed, for this is God's inspired and infallible Word. Granted, there are many difficulties in the Scriptures. There are certain passages far too difficult to be reconciled to human thinking, but the fault is not in the Scriptures; it is in our limited understanding. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The verity of God's Word can never be questioned; "The scripture cannot be broken."

Our Lord declared, "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me and I in Him." We must not overlook the importance of Christ's works to show His deity. His miracles reveal "Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).

When John the Baptist was imprisoned, his staunch faith was obscured by doubt. He dispatched two of his disciples to Christ to ask if He were the true Christ, or should he look for another. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again

those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:4-5).

Christ had stated, "that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." This was enough for His enemies. "Therefore they sought again to take Him; but He escaped out of their hand." With hearts filled with anger they rushed at Him to arrest Him. But instantly the Lord Jesus disappeared from their midst. Another of "the works" that He had just spoken about was performed, and His enemies were restrained while "He escaped out of their hand."

He "went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there He abode." There is no record that Jesus had been "beyond Jordan" since He began His public ministry. It is believed that He abode there three or four months just prior to His crucifixion. His ministry during those several months was evidently a fruitful one, for "many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on Him there." At the time, John the Baptist was in Heaven, but his memory flooded the hearts of many. For this was the locality where he had faithfully told of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

# 11

## THE BELIEVER AND SICKNESS

*John 11:1-6*

One of the most significant of our Lord's miracles is not recorded in the other Gospels. In it Christ is revealed as both God and man.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha." This is the first mention of Lazarus in the New Testament. Very little is known about him. Some have thought that he was the rich young ruler that came to Christ in search of eternal life. He was apparently not poor because of the great "feast" he provided (John 12). These are mere conjectures, however.

"Lazarus" in the Hebrew is "Eleazar," which means "God, my helper." How descriptive, and yet at the same time how providential this name was for one that should be the object of such a miracle. But for those who are in Christ Jesus, having experienced salvation through Him, each one of us can say, "God is my helper." We can declare as did David in Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," though by our needless fear and worry frequently we forget that God is our helper.

Lazarus was "sick." Nothing further is said about the illness. That he died very quickly would suggest that it was a serious illness.

Bethany was a little village nestled on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives several miles east of Jerusalem. Not only was it the place where Lazarus was raised from the dead, but it was where Jesus stayed, the night before His passion. Also, it was from Bethany that He began His triumphant entry into

Jerusalem. Later, it marked the place of Christ's ascension into Heaven.

There are four Marys spoken of as living at the time of Christ: our Lord's Mother, the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and the Mary mentioned here, the sister of Martha, "it was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick."

Anything done for our wonderful Lord is never forgotten. Our little acts of kindness for others may or may not be remembered very long. But everything done for Jesus Christ is recorded in the annals of eternity. Doubtless there were many who would look upon Mary's act as foolish, but Christ recognized the intent of Mary's heart even more than the extent of the sacrifice.

Mary and Martha were greatly concerned about the illness of their brother, thus they sent a message to Christ, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." They did what every Christian should do in the time of illness, or any other need: they sent a message to their Lord. For some, this is the last thing they do. Only after everything else fails, they get in touch with the Lord. God says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2).

The two sisters did not beseech Jesus to heal their brother. They simply said, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." Not, "He whom *we* love," but "he whom *Thou* lovest." Human love is weak and fickle, but God's love is changeless. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The sisters were certain that whether their brother improved or got worse, all would be within the realm of God's love.

The Lord Jesus was staying at Bethabara. The messenger arrived and delivered the message. "When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." By the time the messengers had arrived, Lazarus was already dead. Thus our Lord did not mean that he would not experience death, but rather that he would not be held captive by death.

"That the Son of God might be glorified thereby," applies to every believer's death; for "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Indeed, it is true, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) As He loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, so He loves you if you have trusted in Him as your Saviour and Lord. "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy" (Psalm 145:8). Who could begin to fathom God's love for His own?

We as humans love some people more than others, but God's love is the same toward everyone. Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." Martha was "careful and troubled about many things." Of Lazarus we are told nothing. But Jesus loved them all just the same.

"When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." He purposely delayed His journey to Bethany until after Lazarus was buried. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. This suggests David's words found in Psalm 31:15, "My times are in Thy hand." God does all things according to His own time, which is always the best time. Our responsibility is to trust in His unchangeable promises. "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3). Since we are His sheep, we may be absolutely certain that the Good Shepherd will not fail us. In His own time He will act.

## TO THE WORK

*John 11:7-16*

After waiting in Bethabara two more days, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." He did not say

“Bethany,” but “Judea,” where the Jews had sought to take His life. This disturbed His disciples greatly. “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again?” The disciples were so human, like us, overlooking the fact that Christ was God and whatever He chose to do was for the very best.

“Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.” Christ did not rebuke His disciples for their faithlessness. He merely quoted a familiar proverb and left them to make the application. The Jews divided the day from sunrise to sunset into twelve equal parts. This was the working day. The workman or the traveler had the promise of light to help in his task. At the conclusion of the day, there was no such promise; what needed to be done, should be done before the approach of night.

Our Lord’s ministry was fast approaching the twelfth hour. It was impossible for Him to be slain before His divinely-ordained time. He had declared, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Our Lord’s purpose in going to Judea was stated clearly: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” What a startling statement. Notice the tenderness with which our Lord speaks of death. His language was figurative, of course, and referred only to the body, which was sleeping in the sense of waiting for the resurrection, when it would arise out of sleep. The soul never sleeps. At death, the Christian’s soul goes immediately to be with the Lord. Paul described this as being “absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

It would be easy for anyone to relate the fact of another’s death, but only the Son of God could say, I will “awake him out of sleep.” What He did for Lazarus, He will do for all of His people. How do we know? His own resurrection is our proof. He declared in John 14:19, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” The

body of every believer that goes down into the dust will come forth from the grave a perfect body. What a thrilling hope we have in the hour of death. The grave is not the end.

As was often the case, the disciples misunderstood Christ. "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." Sleep was regarded as a healthy sign in time of sickness. "Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead."

Consider how our Lord prepared the disciples for this message. First He said, "Let us go into Judea again." Then He spoke of the sickness of Lazarus, that they would understand why He wanted to go to Judea. But since they did not understand, He broke the news to them lightly, saying, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." Finally He declared, "Lazarus is dead."

Our Lord deals with each of us as lovingly in the hour of death. How marvelous is His peace. We "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Surely like the unsaved we have sorrow. But our situation is not hopeless like theirs, for we have the promise of everlasting life in Christ. It was John Wesley who said, "Our people die easily." Death to the Christian is the entrance into a larger, fuller life, without limitations of any kind.

It is often difficult to know what to say at the time of death. Sometimes when a child of God dies, even Christians will say, "Isn't that too bad—I am sorry." Should Christians speak this way when we know the deceased has gone into the presence of the Lord? "You have my sympathy," to some degree eases the pain of sorrow, but it does place a crepe where there should be a crown.

Consider what the Lord Jesus said: "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him." Christ was glad. Did He mean that He was glad Lazarus died? No, not that at all. He was glad that, since Lazarus was dead, this would provide an occasion to help. Should this not be the attitude of every true believer at the time of death?—"What can I do to help?"

Christ wanted to bring Lazarus back to life, and He wanted

to help the disciples to believe. His gladness was found in helping others. Even as He went to the cross, this same gladness flooded His heart. "Who for *the joy* that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

There was a quick reply by Thomas, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." His was a gloomy and despondent outlook. He who later doubted our Lord's own resurrection could not foresee that of Lazarus. Thomas is mentioned in other portions of John's Gospel, but each time he looked on the dark side of things.

Thomas was called "Didymus," meaning "twin." In one of his books, Dr. Harry Ironside asks, "I wonder who the other twin was. Perhaps if you look into the mirror, you will see the other one." So often we bear the characteristics of doubting Thomas rather than believe the Lord and trust Him. God says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Do not let the devil rob you of the joy of the Lord by allowing yourself to be overcome by pessimism. Praise the Lord for all things! And you, too, will know the gladness He possessed.

## THE WELCOME SAVIOUR

*John 11:17-29*

When Christ arrived at Bethany, He found that Lazarus "had lain in the grave four days already." Doubtless Lazarus had been buried on the day of his death, which was common in Palestine because of the extremely hot temperatures. The word "found" does not suggest surprise, for our Lord already knew of Lazarus' death. It refers to the length of time Lazarus had been in the grave.

"Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to com-

fort them concerning their brother." It was the practice for comforters to gather in the homes of the bereaved for several days to offer professional comfort. This was an act of Providence in providing an audience for the miracle that was soon to take place.

"Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat still in the house." Martha was quick to act, out-going, always busy. Mary, on the other hand, was a meditator, slower to act, and quieter. One is not to be preferred over the other; both servants of God, with their varied temperaments, are usable by the Lord.

As soon as Martha saw the Lord Jesus, she cried out, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." Martha did not fully comprehend the power of Christ, or she would not have said, "*If* Thou hadst been here," or "*Whatsoever* Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." Though Martha had faith, it was an imperfect faith. But who of us is not guilty? We are well described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly." We are also encouraged by Paul's message in Philippians 4:19. "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This does not mean freedom or deliverance from hardship or toil. But as the death of Lazarus was for the glory of God, so is every experience of the believer. Since He has promised never to forsake us, we can count on Him to provide the necessary strength and help in every hour of need.

The Lord Jesus told Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again." He did not say *when* Lazarus would rise. In all probability the listening disciples understood what our Lord meant, for He had already told them, "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." But Martha did not know this.

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." There was no doubt in Martha's mind about Lazarus' resurrection. Every devout Jew believed this Old Testament truth. Job had declared, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And

though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

What a revelation our Lord had for Martha: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Christ is the resurrection Himself. As He is the Creator and sustainer of all life, He is also the re-creator, giving new life to dead bodies. Those among the living who believe in Him shall never partake of eternal death.

Martha gave a ready response to our Lord's question, "Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." There were no doubts in her mind as to who Christ was.

Consider the three important statements in Martha's confession. First, she declared Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah. Next she claimed Him to be the Son of God. Finally, He was the answer to the Old Testament prophets, the One who was to come into the world. What more was to be said?

"When she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Probably Mary told Martha "secretly" because many of the Jews who had gathered to offer comfort were not sympathetic toward the Lord Jesus.

The knowledge of Christ's nearness brought great consolation to the heart of Mary. "As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto Him." What comfort it brings to know that the Lord Jesus is near! For the child of God, He is always near. Sometimes we become so occupied with our afflictions that we do not see Christ, but He is there. The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 3:3, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." What security we possess because of the ever-present Christ. Oh, believer in Christ, do not be deluded by the wicked one into thinking that you have been left alone. "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." He is concerned about you. He desires to help you.

## THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

*John 11:30-37*

"Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there."

Death to many in our Lord's day brought little or no hope for future bliss. As the Sadducees declared there was no resurrection, and many who held this view were in places of authority, death was but a hopeless blank. Small wonder that they mourned for death many days.

But what about millions in our own day? Is there any greater consolation? Like the Jews of Jesus' day, they know little or nothing of God's sustaining grace and peace. For them, death is an insoluble mystery, a plunge into endless darkness. But no one in our day need be bound by such despair! Our Lord Jesus Christ has declared "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

"Because I live." Christ does live today. His resurrection is one of the best attested facts of history. Since it is true that Christ lives, "Ye shall live also."

When a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ dies, the body is buried and disintegrates in the dust of the earth, but the soul enters immediately into the presence of our Saviour. It is as Christ told the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). If you know Jesus Christ in your heart, you have nothing to fear at death. The grave is not the end for those who have committed themselves to the Son of God.

"Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Mary's thoughts were the

same as Martha's. If only the Lord Jesus had been in Bethany, He could have prevented the death of Lazarus. But though their minds ran in a similar vein, their attitude toward Christ seemed to differ. The sight of the Lord Jesus caused Mary to burst forth in sobs as she fell down at His feet.

Mary's position before our Lord suggests complete commitment and submission. When the Apostle John saw the resurrected Christ, he "fell at His feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17). How needful for us to fall at the feet of the Lord Jesus in humble submission to His holy will.

"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." These words suggest Hebrews 4:15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Not only does the Lord Jesus know about our sorrows but He feels them. Whatever the occasion, regardless of the severity of the anguish and sorrow, we may be assured that "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Jesus was greatly moved by the sorrow of Mary and the Jewish friends who were with her. He asked, "Where have ye laid him?" That is, "Where was Lazarus buried?" "They said unto Him, Lord, come and see." It is not to be thought that Christ did not know where Lazarus was buried, but with sympathy for those who mourned, He asked to be led to the tomb.

"Jesus wept." Literally, "Jesus shed tears." There were two other instances when our Lord wept: when He beheld the city of Jerusalem, before His public entry (Luke 19:41) and later in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39).

There are various reasons suggested as to why Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. Some think it was at the thought of bringing Lazarus back from the glories of Heaven into a sinful world. Others feel it was because of the unbelief of the Jews. Or He wept to assure all believers of every generation that He feels the weight of our sorrows and recognizes the anxiety prompted by life's burdens.

There is nothing wrong in weeping. Christ who hungered, thirsted, slept, walked, and became indignant, also wept. We are told in Romans 12:15 to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

The Jews observed our Lord's weeping. They said, "Behold how He loved him!" J. C. Ryle has declared, "That of all the graces, love is the one which most arrests the attention and influences the opinion of the world." On this occasion our Lord's audience saw in Him the trait that brought Christ from Heaven to earth and that which would soon take Him to the cross. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). This is supreme love, God's love for sinful men.

"And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" In other words, "If He is one with God as He declares, why did He not prove it and prevent Lazarus from dying?" In spite of all the evidences God gives for belief, there are some who will harden their hearts. Our Lord had already said to others of like nature, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

## LIFE FROM THE DEAD

*John 11:38-46*

"Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the grave." Doubtless the sight of Lazarus' burial place caused the "groaning in Himself." Describing the grave, John the apostle tells us, "It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it." Then our Lord commanded, "Take ye away the stone." Christ could have removed the stone in a miraculous way, in the same manner in

which He restored Lazarus to life. But Christ chose to use the human element in the fulfillment of His plan. The men standing by could not bring Lazarus back to life but they could certainly lift the stone out of the way, that the body might be exposed.

God wants each believer to do his part in the work of the Lord. God could do everything without our help, but He chooses to use human instruments, making us "laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Christ is saying to us today, "Take ye away the stone." If we faithfully fulfill our God-given tasks, you may be sure we shall see the miraculous power of the Lord at work.

Martha saw little value in the removal of the stone: "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." In other words, there is no use trying to do anything now, Lord, it is too late.

Notice Christ's firm but gentle rebuke. "Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Unbelief closes the door to the miraculous power of God. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). In contrast, consider Matthew 13:58, "And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." If we would see the "mighty works" of God, we must believe.

After the stone was removed from the grave, "Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Before our Lord performed the remarkable miracle of raising Lazarus, He looked to the Father in prayer.

Do not make a move without seeking the guidance and direction of God in prayer. Nothing is more dangerous for the believer than the neglect of prayer. If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to power.

Christ's prayer at the tomb of Lazarus was one of thanksgiving rather than petition. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast

heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always." Our Lord lived in constant communion with the Father. Though He was one with His Father in His deity, yet He always gave thanks.

The great majority of our prayers are crowded with petitions. It is amazing how many things we have to be thankful for if only we would give them due consideration. It is said that Oliver Cromwell always prayed before meals: "Some people have food but no appetite; others have appetite but no food. I have both. The Lord be praised." God has poured out His blessings abundantly. Let us do as we have been exhorted in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks."

That the Father heard the Son "always" means there was never a time when Christ's prayers were not heard and answered in the manner in which He prayed. This is not true of our prayers, for we do not always pray in the will of God. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing *according to His will*, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Prayer is not a magic wishing well. If we are faithful in prayer, the devil will try to get us to pray out of the will of God. For this reason some prayers bring sorrow instead of joy. Recall the words of David, "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

Balaam, the Old Testament prophet who was hired to curse Israel, kept begging God to let him go on a mission to gain the reward of King Balak. God finally permitted him to do this, but restrained him from cursing the nation. You may be sure that God was displeased with Balaam and his diabolical request. The Scriptures give us the safeguard to protect us from this kind of praying: "Delight thyself also in the LORD: and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4). Some are quick to see only that last phrase of this verse. This is not a blanket promise to get everything you want from God. It is a plea to yield yourself to the Lord's control, and He will put the right desires in your heart, so that you will pray according to His will.

There seems to be a second purpose in Christ's praying at the tomb: "Because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

Then the Lord Jesus "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." If it had been anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ who shouted this command, he would have been a senseless fool. But these words were spoken by the Son of God. The result was that "he that was dead came forth." How astounded the audience must have been!

Someone has suggested that if our Lord had not called Lazarus by name, all the dead in the cemetery would have risen. The day is coming when there will be a mighty shout and all the believing dead will come forth from their graves, when "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The raising of Lazarus is but a foreshadowing of this greater event yet to come.

Our Lord said, "Loose him, and let him go." For Lazarus was "bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin." This was typical of the method of burial used by the Jews.

There are two important facts to be noted here. First our Lord gave Lazarus life, and then He gave him liberty. The same is true in salvation. When one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, the life of God is imparted to him and he becomes spiritually alive. But not only does God give him life, He gives him liberty in the gospel. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

How many there are who make a profession of faith in Christ but never remove the graveclothes of worldliness, materialism, and tradition. Though they have been made alive by Christ, they bear the marks of death. Lazarus left the grave clothes at the tomb. Some who name Christ's name never enter into the joy of salvation; or experience the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The miracle had a twofold effect. "Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." How could anyone refuse to believe after seeing this amazing miracle about which there could be no doubt? Nevertheless, some did. To some, Christ is "the savor of death unto death," while to others He is "the savor of life unto life" (2 Corinthians 2:16). How tragic that these unbelievers, rather than claim Jesus as their Lord, hastened off to the Pharisees to report what they had witnessed.

But some believed on Christ. Had it not been for the sorrow of Mary and Martha, these who had believed might have had no occasion to come in touch with the Son of God. Nothing is ever wasted in the plan of the Lord, not even sorrow. All things are purposeful that come from the hand of Him who is God of all.

There is no mention of Lazarus' experience during the four days of death. It would seem that God closed Lazarus' memory to his visit to the unseen world. Whatever the circumstances, it is obvious that he had nothing to say about them. The Apostle Paul tells "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4). There appears to have been a divine restraint preventing him from sharing the secrets of glory. Doubtless the same was true of Lazarus.

This does not mean that there is nothing awaiting those who love Christ. The Bible has much to say about the future. The important thing is to be ready, to be prepared to meet God and to enter into His glory when the time comes. The true believer has a most blessed future awaiting him after death. But the unbeliever has only sorrow and eternal torment.

## THE WICKED PLOT

*John 11:47-57*

The raising of Lazarus prompted the ecclesiastical leaders to call a meeting. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles." According to the Gospel of John, only once before had they acknowledged that Christ had performed miracles. Those who made this admission were the worst enemies of Christ. Had it not been for public opinion, they would have killed Him long before. Now, they are forced to admit that His miracles were legitimate.

As they met, they evidenced their own selfishness. "If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." Their statement, "all men," meant that the masses would believe on Him. The Romans might then surmise that an insurrection was taking place, that Christ was gathering an army to overthrow them. Since He was a Jew, the Romans would blame the Jewish government, resulting in bondage for the Jews.

Of course, this fear was groundless. The Jewish leaders were jealous of Christ's power and effectiveness. Rather than submit to Him and acknowledge Him as their Messiah, they hated Him, and called a meeting to devise a plan to liquidate Him.

This same spirit of rebellion against the Son of God continues in our day. In spite of the fact that Christ is the Son of God, the eternal Saviour for all who believe in Him, there are thousands who give Him no thought or attention. The Apostle Paul described these pathetic individuals: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with

greediness" (Ephesians 4:18-19). To every unbelieving mind God's Word declares: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:1-3). There is no escape. There is no other Saviour; He is the only One who can save. "I am the LORD, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:18).

"One of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." We may surmise that a rather heated discussion ensued. It seems probable that Nicodemus and others spoke in favor of our Lord. This irked the high priest, who rose to his feet and shouted, "Ye know nothing at all." "Ye" is used here with strong emphasis, directed to certain ones present.

Caiaphas concluded that there was only one solution—Christ must die. Otherwise the entire Jewish race would be brought into bondage to the Romans in the way their forefathers had been enslaved by the Babylonians.

"And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." Caiaphas spake "not of himself." He had no idea that he was prophesying an event that would be one of the greatest of all civilization—that would soon be fulfilled when Christ died on the cross and then, following His burial, would rise again. He was to die "for that nation," that is, for the Jews, but out of all the nations of the world the Church of God was to be formed. The formation of the Church is continuing in our day as men and women of all walks of life confess Christ as Saviour and Lord.

"Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death." The amazing declaration by the high priest

seemed to have silenced the opposition, while the diabolical plan to destroy Christ was put into effect.

One cannot help but sense the power of sin at work in unregenerate hearts as we consider the attitude of these men toward Christ. Indeed, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15).

"Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with His disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves." What hypocrisy is expressed in the words "to purify themselves." They were faithful in fulfilling the law as to outward ceremonies, yet at the same time they were planning a murder.

Are not even Christians also guilty of insincerity? So often we accept the great doctrines in the Bible, but when it comes to applying these truths to our hearts, many of us fall short. "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). It is not mere religious practices that satisfy our Holy God. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). One can be pure in heart only as he receives Christ into his heart and submits himself to Christ's control.

"Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that He will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where He were, he should show it, that they might take Him." There seems to be some wonder as to whether or not Christ would appear at the Passover feast. In the event that He should, it had been commanded that He be arrested immediately.

# 12

## A WORTHY SACRIFICE

*John 12:1-11*

"Six days before the passover" a supper was given in honor of the Lord Jesus in Bethany. Both Matthew and Mark tell us it was in the home of Simon, who had been a leper. Probably out of a heart of gratitude to Jesus for healing him, Simon wanted to join with the sisters, Mary and Martha, in doing something special for our Lord. "Martha served." Martha was always busy for the Lord. Some have criticized her for being too busy, but the greater danger is not to do enough for Him.

"Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him." Here was a man who had died, but through a miracle of Christ he had been raised from the dead and now sat at the table. Some commentators seem to think that it was several months after Lazarus' resurrection.

What a marvelous picture we have here of the marriage supper of the Lamb when all of God's redeemed ones will be gathered in the presence of Christ, clothed with a body of flesh and bones, to give praise and thanksgiving to Him who is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The Christian may die, but he will not stay in the grave, for "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me" (Psalm 49:15).

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." How Mary loved her Lord! One writer has estimated it would have taken a year's labor to pay for the ointment. Mary felt that no sacrifice was too great for her Lord.

Often, where there is a spirit of sacrifice for the Saviour, there will also be the spirit of the Antichrist. "Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" The words "which should betray Him," are literally, "who was about to betray Him."

There is nothing wrong with helping the poor, and those who believe the Scriptures recognize this as part of the Christian's responsibility. But Judas' zeal for the poor was a mere cover-up for the greed and covetousness of his own heart. "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."

The Lord Jesus reprimanded Judas, "Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this." How quick our Lord was to care for His own. He knew the heart of Mary. Likewise, He knew Judas' heart. Christ's anointing with spikenard was not a waste, but it was purposeful. Doubtless God laid it upon the heart of Mary to keep the ointment for some outstanding occasion, but its meaning was far more than Mary's finite mind had realized. Our Saviour came not to live but to die. His death was not an accident, but according to the plan of God.

Jesus declared, "For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always." In every society, regardless of the type of government, there will always be the poor and the rich. But the cross was not far distant; He would soon be gone. There would be plenty of time to think about the needs of the poor.

The news spread quickly of Christ's personal appearance in Bethany. "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus."

The chief priests were confused. They wanted to kill Jesus, but they were confronted with another irrefutable argument. Lazarus had been raised from the dead. This they could not deny. Thus it seemed feasible to destroy him first, then Jesus.

Rather than admit their wrong, they were ready to commit murder. Like many in our day, rather than repent and believe, they sought for another way. But God has made it clear in His Word that there is no other way. Christ is the way, and without Him there is no escape from sin.

### THE OFFICIAL ENTRY

*John 12:12-19*

A great host of people, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, lined the road, and with great enthusiasm waved palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." This was a quotation from Psalm 118:26.

Many were certain that Christ was the true Messiah but others were mere curiosity seekers following the crowd. They joined in crying, "Hosanna," but only a few days later many of them joined the angry mob in shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

"Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." This was a remarkable fulfillment of an Old Testament declaration made more than five hundred years before: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9). Not only had the Spirit of God led men of old to tell of a coming Redeemer, they were divinely guided to write even the particulars of His earthly life and ministry.

"These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these

things unto Him." Probably it was not until after His ascension that many things our Lord had done and many of the words He had spoken suddenly became clear to the disciples. They were slow to believe. Being of this world, they found it difficult to walk by faith. Indeed, we who are believers need to learn the lesson of trusting God. A limited faith can produce only a limited life.

Raising Lazarus from the dead possibly had a greater effect upon the public than any other miracle our Lord had performed. "The people therefore that was with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record." That is, those who had witnessed this remarkable miracle declared that Christ must indeed be the Messiah because of His power to control death. "For this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle."

The mighty crowd which gathered to honor the Lord Jesus caused the Pharisees much grief. "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after Him." All their intentions had been foiled. Instead of resisting Him and killing Him, the people worshiped Him. The Pharisees were baffled. If they were to take Christ by force and arrest Him, there would have been an insurrection among the people.

## WE WOULD SEE JESUS

*John 12:20-26*

"There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast." These were Gentiles who were dissatisfied with their pagan worship. They did not find their answer in Judaism. "The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus."

"Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus." Why Philip did not go to the Lord directly with this request, we can only surmise. Possibly he felt that since these inquirers were Gentiles, Christ would not want to see them. It seems, however, that Andrew's advice was to go to Jesus. Thus we see both Philip and Andrew approaching the Saviour.

John tells us nothing about the Greeks being admitted into the presence of Jesus, but what follows suggests that He replied not only to the disciples but to the Greeks as well. Reading between the lines it seems to me that what Jesus actually said in verse 23 was, "You desire to see Me? You have come at a good time. The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." To "be glorified" really means to be honored. Thousands of Jews as well as the visiting Greeks were anxious to do homage to Jesus, to make Him a king. He explained that He would be honored, but not in the way they thought. In fact, the first step in His exaltation would be humiliation, for "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here, of course, He was speaking of His death on the cross and His resurrection, which would provide life for all who would believe.

Those who choose to follow Him would not find a life of ease and comfort. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." There is a sense in which the true believer must "die" with Christ. He must die to popularity, the world, lust, and evil of every sort. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). Those who would be His disciples must follow Him in a spiritual death, burial, and resurrection. This is a distinct call to discipleship. Discipleship is discipline-ship, to be Christ-controlled rather than self-controlled. This should be the goal and ambition of every follower of Christ. Nothing less is satisfying to the Saviour. Until the believer enters into this experience, he will be of little value to his Lord.

Jesus declared, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and

where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor." Probably this was spoken for the sake of the inquiring Greeks. To become His servant meant to be a follower of Him, a life of cross-bearing, as we are told in 1 Peter 2:21: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." He suffered; we who are His servants must suffer as well. Any of us would prefer a life free from suffering, pain, and anguish. But such a life is not available for those who would truly follow Christ, for He Himself knew nothing of this kind of life. There is a tremendous cost in being a Christian, yet it is even more costly not to be a Christian.

"Where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor." Even though the way becomes difficult and the going is hard, the Lord will sustain us in every circumstance of life. And after we have completed our earthly pilgrimage, we shall be in Paradise with Him. As each day passes, we are another step closer to being with Him. This provides marvelous encouragement for the overworked, unappreciated saint of God. Sometimes the way becomes difficult and we say with the Apostle Paul, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). But the work is not completed. We must labor on and fulfill the task to which God has called us. Satan would try to discourage us, to get us to quit, but we must continue to follow Christ as faithful servants, with the thrilling anticipation of "Where I am, there shall also My servant be."

### GLORIFY THY NAME

*John 12:27-33*

With the cross near at hand, our Lord made the astounding statement, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto

this hour." In the shadow of the cross, was our Saviour becoming fearful? Was He shrinking from the responsibility of which He had spoken so boldly? There is no hint of such a thing here. Those who look upon Christ's death as that of a martyr, a good man dying for a worthy cause, would say Jesus was "troubled" because of the fear and anxiety that accompanies death. But all who accept the testimony of the Word of God know that Jesus did not die a martyr's death.

Why then was He troubled? It was the burden of sin that brought deep sorrow to His heart. Our Lord's Gethsemane had already begun. Thus with intense mental anguish He cried out, "What shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Let me suggest several words to make the meaning clearer: "*With the cross so near at hand, what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? Ah no, for this cause I came unto this hour.*" There is no intimation here that Christ was seeking to evade the cross.

"Father, glorify Thy name." Bishop J. C. Ryle declared that this "brief prayer which our Lord here offers is the highest, greatest thing that we can ask God to do." The words embody a complete resignation to the will and plan of God. Being perfectly human as well as divine, our Lord's heart was breaking because all of man's sin was to be placed upon Him even though He Himself had never sinned. Yet He declared, "Father, glorify Thy name." Is this not the highest goal for all believers in this life? Whatever our circumstances, regardless of how sorrowful or painful, if they can be used for the glory of God and if His Name is magnified through us, what more could we ask?

"Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." This was the third time such a voice came from Heaven during our Lord's ministry. The first was at His baptism when the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. The second took place at the transfiguration when Moses and Elias appeared with Christ in the presence of Peter, James, and John.

There are various ideas as to what is meant by the statement,

"I have . . . glorified it, and will glorify it again." Some think God glorified His name in all of His dealings with mankind from the time of creation. Others limit this to Christ and His ministry. Others feel that the Father's name was glorified in the raising of Lazarus and it would again be glorified in the raising of Christ. Still others seem to think that this statement had a special application to Satan, that as God's name was glorified in defeating Satan in the wilderness, the Father's name would also be glorified in defeating Satan at the cross. To me the choice of a viewpoint is not of great importance. God has glorified His name in every possible way during the course of history. The fact of greatest importance seems to be in His words, "I will glorify it again," which appear to refer to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Note the response of the audience to the miracle of the voice speaking from Heaven, "The people therefore that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to Him." Some were not paying much attention and did not recognize the voice as being articulate, thinking it was simply thunder. Those who were close to our Lord concluded that an angel must have spoken. But there was a divine intervention in a declaration from the heavens above.

Christ clarified the purpose of the message: "This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." The voice was a sign and a witness to those who were standing by, that Jesus was truly the promised Messiah.

"The judgment of this world," of which Christ spoke, was to be meted out at the cross for the sin of the world. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). Some have rendered the word "judgment" here as "crisis," suggesting that the greatest crisis in all of the history of the world culminated in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. But primarily it was the wrath of God being poured upon the Son for our sins.

"Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." The devil is

spoken of here, "the prince of this world." When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the devil's power was reduced and his authority was diminished. Prior to Christ's first coming, the devil plagued the bodies of men constantly. But even today, though "the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8), his potency has been curtailed greatly. On the cross the astounding prophecy of Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." Satan's head was bruised. He was not slain or destroyed, but as the prophecy foretold, his power was limited. When Christ returns, the devil will be brought into complete subjection: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:1-2).

The fact that the devil's power has been broken often is either ignored or unknown by many Christians. They visualize him as the believer's foe in the sense that they almost think of him as possessing the power of Christ. But Christ has declared, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." It is God's will that every believer live victoriously. How necessary that we claim the power of Christ to overcome all sin.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die." The expression of being "lifted up" has been used previously in this Gospel. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Christ used one of the well-known experiences taken from the wilderness wanderings of the Jews to illustrate the fact that even as the serpent of brass was lifted up on a pole as the means of physical healing for all who looked to the serpent, so Christ would be lifted up on the cross as the means for spiritual healing for all who should believe on Him.

Christ's prophecy given here actually could be read, "And I, if I be lifted up *out of* the earth." This includes the resurrection, ascension, and glorification, as well as our Saviour's death on the cross—the entire finished work of Christ for redemption.

Some have misinterpreted the meaning of the word "all" in this same verse, suggesting that it means universal salvation. Such teaching is not to be found here nor any other place in the Bible. There is no such thing as universal salvation. In some passages in the Bible, the word "all" is used to mean "without exception." In other portions it means "without distinction." There is no question about its meaning in verse 32: that the sacrifice Jesus was to make for sin was for all men regardless of their nationality. Jesus did not die for the Jews only, but for *whoever* would believe on Him.

It seems obvious, however, that there is one portion of this prophecy yet to be fulfilled. The day is coming when literally everyone will be drawn to Him. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:10-11, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." At His second advent Christ will reign with peace and righteousness and all men will bow in respect to His glory and power. At the conclusion of His thousand-year reign, every grave will be opened and all who died unsaved will be brought before Him for the purpose of judgment. Even before His death, Christ gave this notable prophecy that should not be overlooked, especially by those who have never responded to God's provision of salvation.

Christ does not compel men to come to Him, for God has endowed everyone with freedom of choice and will. But the Lord has made every necessary provision so that all one needs to be saved is to receive the person of Christ into his life. God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

## THE EVIL OF UNBELIEF

*John 12:34-43*

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." This statement provoked two questions among the Lord's listeners: "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest Thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?"

The first question was theological. The Jews understood that the lifting up of Christ meant the cross; the difficulty over which they stumbled was that the Messiah should suffer and die. They could not reconcile what He said with the Old Testament Scriptures.

The second question was personal, what they considered a contradiction between Christ's teaching regarding the Messiah and what they had been taught from the Old Testament. Thus they were unable to accept a crucified, suffering Messiah. They expected Him to come and reign in power as a mighty monarch at His first advent.

Our Lord answered their questions, but not directly. "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide Himself from them." As far as we know, Christ concluded His public ministry with these words, which appeal to the listening Jews to become His followers immediately. Christ was the Light of the World in whom they should place their trust. But the Light was soon to depart by means of the cross and later the ascension. Now was their time to believe.

"But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him." A miracle may bring one to the

place where he recognizes the power of God, but beyond this, there must be a sincere heart commitment to Jesus Christ. Our Lord performed scores of miracles, but as John declared, "Yet they believed not on Him."

The attitude of the Jews toward Christ had been prophesied centuries before by the Prophet Isaiah: "That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" This does not mean that the people "believed not on Him" so that the prophecy of Isaiah could be fulfilled. Rather, it confirmed it, assuring us of the truth of the Scriptures.

The question asked by John, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" also begins Isaiah 53 (a chapter completely ignored by the majority of Jews for centuries), and might also be translated, "No one believes our report." God foresaw the hardness of human hearts, even as He gave this remarkable Old Testament prophecy regarding the suffering and death of His beloved Son. "The arm of the LORD" is really *the power* of the Lord. God has provided redemption through His mighty power, but in spite of this man chooses the way of the flesh and ignores the life directed by the Holy Spirit.

The next several verses seem to provide confusion for many: "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." A casual reading of these verses would suggest fatalism, that the Jews who rejected Christ could do nothing else because Isaiah prophesied this would be their lot. The word "therefore" is really *on account of this*. That is, because of the refusal of the Jews to believe as shown in verse 38, "they could not believe." This is the judgment that falls upon those who habitually resist the grace and kindness of the Lord.

One of the most notable examples of such an experience is that of Pharaoh. We read that God "hardened his heart." But before Pharaoh's heart was hardened by God, he had hardened

his own heart against God. The same is found in the New Testament. After God's revelation of Himself to men, we read in Romans 1:21: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." The outcome was that "God gave them up." Three times this statement is given to impress upon us that one's heart may be hardened and his eyes closed to the truth if he habitually turns his face from the Lord.

"These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him." This refers to Isaiah 6:1: "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." "Lord" as used here is "Jehovah." Isaiah saw Jehovah. How could this be, for Jehovah God had declared in Exodus 33:20, "No man shall see Me, and live"? John made it clear that it was Christ's glory that Isaiah saw and that Isaiah spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Whether these of whom John writes had experienced salvation is difficult to decide. Yet from some we have met in our own day, who are like them, we must concede that it was possible for them to be true believers.

They were fearful of being excommunicated. Choosing to have a good standing in the synagogue rather than to be true to their convictions, they neglected to bare witness to Christ. In this connection, we must not overlook the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 10:32-33: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven."

## HOW TO SEE GOD

*John 12:44-50*

As we come to the last portion of this twelfth chapter of John, there seems to be some question as to whether the apostle was summarizing the teachings of Jesus or whether this was an actual discourse given by our Lord Himself. Whichever was the case does not in any way affect the content. What he recorded is actual fact and strongly emphasizes the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ speaks of His oneness with the Father. "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me." The word "cried" really means "a loud cry," calling for full attention. "Believeth not on Me" means that the truly repentant soul believes not on Christ only, but on God the Father also. It is impossible for one to believe on the Lord Jesus without believing on the Father because they are both one and the same God. Though two distinct personalities, the Son and the Father are not divisible in the Godhead.

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). How many there are who say, "I believe in God," but do they really believe in God? Not unless they have trusted in Christ and claimed Him as their Redeemer. For there is no approach to God the Father except through Jesus the Son.

"And he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me." This verse and the previous one leave no room for speculation regarding the deity of Christ. Indeed, He was more than a man. Christ was equal with the Father in His deity. We cannot explain the Father-Son relationship to the human mind. There are mysteries involved, but this should not be a hindrance to belief.

Again our attention is turned from the humanity of Christ to His deity: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness." It is true that

believers in Christ "are lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). But Christ came as "a light" to banish the darkness of sin. As the sun rises in the morning and the darkness of night disappears, so when the Son of Righteousness is received into one's life, the darkness of sin, with all of its accompanying sufferings and sorrows, disappears. The sinner becomes a new man in Christ. He becomes a light in the world because of his relationship to Him who is "come a light into the world."

Those who believe on Christ will "not abide in darkness." Here is the test of belief. Those who possess the light of Christ will "walk in the light, as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). For one to say that he has received Christ and yet to continue on walking in darkness is to condemn himself as a hypocrite and a liar. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). This leaves no room for immorality, unkindness, or any other form of darkness.

"And if any man hear My words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Christ came to be a Saviour: "God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). This does not mean, however, that He will never be a judge. "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." All the words Christ has spoken, the truth of Scripture, will condemn the unrighteous, leaving them without excuse.

Christ has assured us that there will be a "last day." Everything will be finished prior to the judgment of God. All without Christ will be judged before the throne of God. It will be too late to repent. The books will be opened, the evidence will be presented, and those without the Lord will be condemned to eternal hell. What God has stated in His Word will be fulfilled in every detail. Christ came the first time as the suffering Saviour, meek and lowly. But He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

"For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what

I should speak." Once again we see the perfect unity that existed between the Father and the Son. "I have not spoken of Myself" means, "I have not spoken about Myself but out of Myself." What Christ said when He was on earth reflected the counsel He had enjoyed with the Father in Heaven. No wonder the unbelieving soldiers declared, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). Christ spoke the words of God because He was one with God.

"And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak." In the counsels of Heaven before Christ came to this world, it was decided that He would speak about life eternal. And truly He did. This was the basis of His message wherever He went. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have *everlasting life*." John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath *everlasting life*: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 4:14, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into *everlasting life*." John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath *everlasting life*, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 6:27, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto *everlasting life*, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed." John 6:40, "And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have *everlasting life*: and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:47, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath *everlasting life*." Our Lord came to tell us how to have *everlasting life*.

We who know the Lord must be busy telling the story of Christ that those with whom we come in contact might enter into the experience of everlasting life. "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so," the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 107:2.

# 13

## THE HOUR HAS COME

*John 13:1-5*

In chapters 13—17 the Lord Jesus gives His disciples final instructions as He reveals Himself to them more fully. How thankful we should be for these five chapters which have been of such great blessing to the Christian Church. They are of vital importance because neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke had anything to say about what is recorded in them.

The scene is in the upper room and the occasion is the Passover supper to which the disciples had been invited. It was the night of Christ's betrayal and the eve of His crucifixion. Who could begin to understand the severe suffering and anguish Christ endured during those several hours?

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Each of the Gospels declares that Christ's crucifixion took place at the time of the Passover.

There were several reasons why Christ was crucified at the time of the Passover. One was the relationship of the Passover to Christ. Not only did the Passover commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from their Egyptian bondage, it also had a prophetic message. It graphically portrayed Him who would come to be the true Passover to deliver from sin all who would believe on Him.

Furthermore, those who had gathered for this great feast returned to their homes with the news of Christ's crucifixion. Consequently the whole known world heard of the crucifixion and probably of the resurrection as well.

The long awaited hour had finally arrived when Christ should die for the sin of the world, rise from the dead, and ascend into the presence of His Father. What a beautiful description of death is given here as a departing "out of this world unto the Father." Christ led the way over which all His own would follow during the ensuing centuries.

Christ "loved His own which were in the world," but not only that, "He loved them unto the end." Christ's love is unchangeable. It is not dependent upon our diligence or faithfulness but upon the fact that "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

"And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him." The word "ended" is not in the original text. The use of the sop (verse 26) would indicate that the supper was not finished until this time. The devil was invisibly present and at the opportune moment, he performed his subtle deed. The word "put" is really the word "cast." The devil "cast" into Judas' heart to betray Christ. This suggests the casting of "the fiery darts" of the wicked one spoken of in Ephesians 6:16.

Often it is asked, "Was Judas saved?" It is obvious that if Christ had dwelt in Judas' heart, the devil could never have put it into his heart to betray Christ. How tragic that a man who had lived and worked with the Lord Jesus for three and one-half years was still unconverted! He went about the cities and villages from place to place witnessing the mighty works of the Lord Jesus. Doubtless he preached and performed miracles in Christ's name himself, for the disciples were sent out by twos with "power over unclean spirits" (Mark 6:7).

This incident reminds us how close one may be to salvation, yet miss it altogether. Judas was religious. Even the disciples were deceived into thinking that he was one of them. Of course, Christ was not deceived; long before, He had asked the question, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70)

Satan always works through our natural lusts and appetites. Judas' besetting sin was covetousness. He was greedy, willing to

do anything for money. Satan knew this, as he knows the weaknesses of all of us. He is a master psychologist.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself.” Even though Satan is mighty, Christ is Almighty. “The Father had given all things into His hands.” Furthermore, Satan was merely an angel; the Lord Jesus was the Son of God who came from God the Father and soon would return to Him.

The Lord Jesus got up from supper, laid aside His loose outer garment, and girded Himself with a towel. He then poured “water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.” In a hot country like Palestine, where the people wore no stockings or socks and the roads were extremely dusty, it was customary to wash the feet of guests at any occasion. But usually the task was performed by a servant. Our Lord’s action here foreshadows the cross. He “took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). What a lesson this must have been for the disciples!

Considering our Lord’s action in bowing to wash Judas’ feet, we can sense something of Christ’s deep humility. Ponder on these two verses together, “The Father had given all things into His hands.” . . . “After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” The Sovereign King became the willing slave.

The humble man possesses true wisdom, a right relationship to his fellowmen. Pride, on the other hand, is weakness. The proud man is self-deceived, ignorant of his real self. The Bible teaches that a humble spirit is an essential requirement and a rich adornment for those who would truly follow Christ.

## A WORTHWHILE EXAMPLE

*John 13:6-15*

"Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" Actually, Peter was asking, "Lord Jesus, are You, the Son of God, going to wash the feet of a sinful person like me?"

It is not known whether Christ went to Peter after washing the feet of the other disciples or whether He went to him immediately after getting the basin of water. Some believe, as another act of His profound humility, that our Lord went to Judas first and then to Peter. Whatever the case may be, it is obvious that the Apostle Peter was moved by our Lord's humble concern for each of His disciples.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." How comforting these words are, not only for Peter but for us. So often we become confused and perplexed because we cannot understand everything. God never intended that we should. "The ways of the LORD are right" (Hosea 14:9). If we belong to Him who makes no mistakes, what have we to fear?

It would seem that "hereafter" referred explicitly to the time following Peter's cowardly denial of Christ. Then he would understand the need for cleansing in his life, that he might have fellowship with the Lord and enjoy His mighty power. Peter had his "hereafter," at which time he became a mighty firebrand for God. But in the upper room, the apostle was confused and disturbed about having the Son of God perform such a menial task for him. Thus he cried out, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." How hasty and impetuous Peter was! How useless for any of us to tell God what He should or should not do!

Peter's motive was correct, though his attitude was wrong.

Our Saviour rebuked him quietly yet firmly, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Christ's words disturbed Peter so greatly that he went from one extreme to the other: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Suddenly he asked for an entire bath. He was unaware of the spiritual application of the Lord's words.

Our Lord replied, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." When one is born again by placing faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, at that moment he "is clean every whit." This is "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5) whereby the sinner is justified, declared no longer guilty by the grace of God. He is completely forgiven of all sin—past, present, and future. Peter had already been through this experience; what he needed was rather the cleansing from daily defilement that affects one's communion with Christ, mentioned in 1 John 1:9.

"For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean." There was one present who had never experienced complete cleansing. God knows the hearts of all, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7).

"So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." That is what Christ wants to be to every believer; Lord of our lives.

"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Some devout believers interpret these words literally and practice feet washing, feeling that our Lord instituted this practice even as He established baptism and the Lord's Supper. It would seem, however, that Christ did not mean for these words to be taken literally. The "example" He spoke about was one of humility and love, for in this act He displayed His true humility and His great love for each of His chosen ones.

Some years later the Apostle Peter wrote in his first Epistle: "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and

giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

## PROFESSION AND PRACTICE

*John 13:16-20*

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither He that is sent greater than He that sent Him." Even the disciples were still influenced by the widespread thinking that the Messiah would come with great might to set up His kingdom and subdue all earthly powers. But more and more, Christ became an enigma. The disciples were expected to be willing to perform any lowly service as their Lord had been willing to humble Himself. But what our Lord said meant more than this; His statement was also prophetic. The disciples could expect no more than what Christ would receive. Since He was to be slain by wicked men, they might well expect the same kind of treatment from the world. Eventually all of them laid down their lives for the cause of Christ with but two exceptions. Judas, of course, proved himself to be a traitor, while the Apostle John was banished to the Isle of Patmos and died in exile for his faithful stand for Christ.

"He that is sent" is translated in other passages, "the apostle." Thus Christ speaks here of a servant and an apostle. They are one and the same.

In verse 17 our Lord emphasized the importance of practice as well as profession in the Christian experience, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The value of knowledge should not be underestimated. Yet knowledge without practice can be satanic, for that "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). "Believe" does not mean that the devils reliably trust in the Lord, but rather that they

have knowledge of the truth. Their failure is that they do not act upon the truth or apply it. The same is true of many humans whose heads are crammed with knowledge about God and His Word, but whose hearts are empty.

"I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me." The Lord Jesus knows us completely. Though Judas thought he was deceiving Christ, he deceived himself only. Christ spoke about putting knowledge into practice. One cannot apply the truth unless he is born again. Judas had never been born again. Judas' failure to repent concurred with prophecy. Our Lord's statement was a quotation taken from Psalm 41:9 which had been given many centuries before by the Holy Spirit.

"Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He." When Judas exposed himself the disciples would understand that Christ had known of Judas' hypocrisy long before. Such knowledge would provide them with a fresh confirmation of Christ's Messiahship.

The word "He" at the end of the verse has been inserted by the translators. Actually the verse reads, "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am." The "I Am" here is the one who appeared to Moses in the bush that was burned but was not consumed. After Moses was commissioned to be the leader of his people, he wanted to know the name of the one who sent him, in order to declare his authority. "God said unto Moses . . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14). This was the Lord Jesus Christ who fellowshiped with His disciples in the upper room many years later and declared, "Ye may believe that I am." These prophecies and their fulfillment could not just happen. This is God's Word which clearly presents God's Son.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." This must have been a great encouragement to the disciples, after having heard of the deceiver in their midst.

They would never be alone, and whoever received them would at the same time be respecting Jesus Christ. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matthew 25:40).

## THE TRAITOR REVEALED

*John 13:21-30*

"When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." Doubtless our Lord was disturbed greatly by the burden of the sin of the world that would soon put Him on the cross. But considering the context, I feel that He was exercised in heart because of the traitor who turned against Him.

How do we account for the fact that Judas turned out the way he did after such wonderful companionship? Judas' experience proves to us the hardness of the human heart. How pathetic that he resisted the love of God and turned to the way of the world.

"Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake." They were stunned, to say the least. No one suspected such a thing. The word "doubting" is really the word for "perplexed" or "puzzled."

As so often, Peter was the first one to respond. He "beckoned" to the one who "was leaning on Jesus' bosom," "one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved," apparently the Apostle John. This expression occurs four times in this gospel, as John considers the marvelous grace and love of God in saving him and calling him to be an apostle.

Some commentators feel that Christ did have a special affection for John because he was the youngest member of the apostles, perhaps an adolescent at the time. If these commentators are correct, we can understand the Lord Jesus' special

love for young people. He is concerned about them, and desires that they come to Him, get right with Him, and then follow in His chosen paths. God says to every young person in our day, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Simon Peter beckoned to the apostle reclining on the bosom of Jesus to ask "who it should be of whom He spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." "The sop" was a "morsel" often given to a special guest as a mark of respect. Our Lord loved even Judas to the very end. David declared in Psalm 107:1, "O give thanks unto the LORD for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever." Judas, a hardened, rebellious sinner could have still come to Christ. Apart from the grace of Christ, there is no forgiveness. Like Judas, all unbelievers must meet a sorrowful end.

"And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly." This does not mean that Satan entered into him for the first time. Satan had always been in Judas. Now he took control of him. This should warn all of us as to the power of the great deceiver, who is "A murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

The die was cast. There was no further hope for Judas. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6). Christ gave up Judas "to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1:28). Judas chose destruction. Now he must hasten to his doom.

"Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him." The disciples were becoming more perplexed all the time, having no idea that there was a deceiver among them. Nor did they understand Christ's words, "That thou doest, do quickly." "For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor."

There were no questions in Judas' mind. "He, then, having received the sop, went immediately out; and it was night." So that his wicked plot would not be discovered and so that Christ would say no more, Judas made a hasty exit.

There was to be one more meeting between Christ and Judas on this earth, in the garden when Christ would be taken prisoner. But there is to be another meeting when Judas will stand before Jesus Christ. There will be no sop handed to the traitor at that time as our Lord's expression of affection for the erring one, but standing before the judgment bar of God, Judas will hear the words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). "It was night" for Judas; because he loved darkness rather than light. He went out into the night of eternity, lost forever, without hope and without God. How tragic that one so close to the heart of God ended so far from salvation.

### THE NEW COMMANDMENT

*John 13:31-38*

"Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." The cross was foremost in our Lord's mind, for it was there that God would be "glorified in Him" and God the Father would glorify God the Son. This

prophecy was fulfilled the next day as Christ went to the cross to be crucified between two thieves.

Was there any glory in such an ignominious death? Was it glory to hang naked six hours on a cross, suffering untold agony and anguish? For Christ, it was. This was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding His sacrifice, as well as those He had given repeatedly during the three and a half years of His public ministry. Small wonder that even years later the Apostle Paul wrote, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

Then our Lord gave a very important message to His beloved disciples. He began with a term of unusual tenderness, "Little children," the only time He ever used this expression, "yet a little while I am with you." The cross was only hours away. "Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you." They had no idea what He meant. The expression, "ye shall seek Me," literally is, "ye shall wonder, ye shall be perplexed about My absence." The disciples would be as little children who lost their parents in a crowd. They would be greatly disturbed immediately after His death.

But there was a message Christ had to leave with His own: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." This commandment was not "new" but was centuries old. Moses declared in Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Christ gave a new emphasis to this divine truth that should mark the Christian Church as being different from the legalistic Jews who ignored the commandment of love.

Love among Christians was to be the kind that He demonstrated throughout His ministry. In just a matter of hours, the disciples saw this love exemplified as no one had ever seen it in the Old Testament dispensation. For "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). It was in this same manner that Christ's followers were to "love one another."

This love for one another would be the badge of discipleship,

easily recognizable. Discipleship is not primarily worship, Bible reading, prayer, or witnessing; the supreme test is love. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Christ had said, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." This seemed to be too much for Peter's curiosity, so he asked, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" Our Lord did not say at the time where He was going, though He did give more detail later (John 14). He simply said, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." Peter persisted, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." It is obvious that Peter did not understand what our Lord was saying, nor did he realize what he himself was saying.

Peter was bold in his assertion, but his flesh was weak. "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice." Peter thought he would lay down his life for Christ, but when the real test came, he began "to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man" (Matthew 26:74).

Christ had said (Luke 22:31-32), "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." In his denial, Peter was sifted as wheat. He was brought face to face with his own incapabilities. But when he saw his risen Lord, he came to a turning point in his life, and from that hour he went forth as a mighty conqueror for Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, baptized with Pentecostal power, he stood before his audience as a mighty voice for God, and at least three thousand were converted. Later Peter did follow Christ to the cross, but it was a different Peter than we see in John 13.

# 14

## HOPE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS

*John 14:1-3*

Chapters 14 through 17 provide the holy of holies of John's Gospel. There is no break following chapter 13, the scene continues in the upper room.

In the first three verses we see the provision, the prospect, and the prophecy. As to the *provision*, the Lord Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." For centuries the Jews had believed in God the Father, though "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18).

Soon the Lord Jesus would not be seen, even by His disciples. As the Old Testament saints had trusted God the Father in the past, so the disciples should fully trust Christ in the days to come, for His divine eye would be on them constantly.

Simon Peter had asked, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" (chapter 13) Christ did not answer his question immediately, but He does here: "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The believer's *prospect* for the future is wonderful.

It should not be thought that God has a great house in Heaven with walls, a roof, and rooms. The expression, "the Father's house," means that Heaven is a place for the family of God. The Lord has made this provision for His family. Heaven is "home" for those who love the Lord. This earth is not our home. "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14). We are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13), but we shall not be strangers and pilgrims in our "Father's house."

The Lord Jesus spoke of "many mansions." A better translation would be "many abiding places" or "resting places." In other words, there is plenty of room in Heaven. Very often in Eastern homes large families had small dwelling places. But in their "Father's house" none will be forced into cramped quarters.

The *prophecy* is in verse 3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The fact of the prepared place is repeated. In light of this, Jesus declares, "I will come again." There is no question about our Lord's ascension into Heaven to prepare a place for us. Since the first has been completed, we may look forward confidently to the second. There was no need for the disciples to be troubled because of Christ's departure, for He would come back again to gather His family together unto Himself, never to leave them again.

There are some who interpret this to mean our Lord would come back to them after His resurrection. But this seems unreasonable. In practically every case where Christ refers to His "coming again," it means His second advent. He came into the world once, born of the humble and lowly virgin. Throughout the Word of God we are told that He will come back again in mighty power to rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

There are those also who say that the coming of Christ takes place at the believer's death, that it is then that He comes and takes them to Heaven. Still others declare that He came on the Day of Pentecost in the person of the Holy Spirit. But these ideas cannot be reconciled with the many verses in the Bible that teach otherwise. Notice what Jesus said in Luke 21:25-28: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then

look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Do these phenomenal events occur when a believer dies? Did they transpire on the Day of Pentecost? The Lord Jesus will return, visibly, bodily, even as He said He would, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again."

It is thrilling to know that He will return for His own. He declared, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Paul called this the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). Indeed, it is the blessed hope of all believers living in a world of sin, sorrow, and tragedy. We can look up with expectancy. The time is coming when we shall meet the Lord in the air according to His promise.

## GOD'S WAY TO LIFE

*John 14:4-11*

"Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Repeatedly our Saviour had instructed His disciples regarding this great truth, but they lacked the spiritual discernment to grasp His meaning. Confused, Thomas replied, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." Christ did not say, "I am *a* way," nor "I am the *way-shower*." He stated clearly and conclusively, "I am *the* way."

Furthermore, Christ said, "I am the truth." There seem to be so many voices these days. Every kind of philosophy imaginable is being taught. How does one know what to believe? Believe the truth! But what is truth? Christ is truth. Without Jesus Christ, the wisest man in the world is spiritually ignorant because he has never come to a knowledge of eternal truth. John 8:32 declares, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The truth that produces freedom is the

person of Jesus Christ. When one believes on Him, he enters into the freedom known only to those who have been born again.

Our Lord said also, "I am the life." Christ and eternal life are the same. Jesus Christ could say, "I give unto them eternal life" (John 10:28). He is the source and sustainer of life. There is no life apart from Him. Thus, as "the way, the truth, and the life," He is everything, the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (Revelation 1:11). Thus He could say, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

Knowledge of the Father is gained through knowledge of the Son. "If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." It is true that God has revealed Himself in creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3). But one cannot understand the mind of God from creation, he can only discover the greatness and power of the Creator. It is only through God's Son that we are able to discern God's thoughts, especially regarding salvation.

"Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Our Lord seemed somewhat distressed at Philip's request. "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" Those who would hear the voice of the Father must give attention to the words of the Son. This truth is presented clearly in Hebrews 1:1-3: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

It has been said that some sixteen or more saviors have lived

and died in the past. But examine their credentials and you will be convinced of their error. Jesus Christ claimed that He was the Son of God, that He came to save men who were lost, and that He would die in their place, be buried, and arise from the dead. He did all He claimed He would. His life was pure and blameless, whether viewed by Roman governors, Jewish priests, secular historians, atheists, infidels, agnostics, or Christian believers. His death was sublime. By renouncing His claims He could have escaped it. But He deliberately laid down His life on the cross. The monument which succeeds His earthly sojourn is composed of millions who have found in Him supernatural strength in a living and reliant faith. To be sure, He that has seen Christ has seen the Father.

The Lord Jesus asked Philip another question, though it would seem that it was for the benefit of all. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" The meaning here is, "Have I been with you these three and a half years and you have not realized this yet? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake." If the disciples were not satisfied to believe on the basis of what Christ taught, there was no sidestepping the fact of His supernatural works.

### THREE WONDERFUL PROMISES

*John 14:12-17*

Realizing the disciples' discouragement and disappointment, Christ provided cheer for their downcast spirits by giving three important promises.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these

shall he do; because I go unto My Father." This verse is often claimed as a proof text for the working of miracles in our day, especially healing miracles. Without doubt, the saints in the early Church were far more effective in working miracles than anyone today. Yet, who wrought miracles "greater" than those performed by the Lord Jesus Christ? Has there ever been anyone who has performed "greater works" than raising one who has been dead four days? What our Lord promised here cannot possibly have to do with miracles that benefit the body.

Whenever Christ ministered to the bodies of men, it was that they might heed His words regarding their souls. He declared, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Recall the Day of Pentecost, some fifty days after our Lord ascended into Heaven. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached a sermon and three thousand were converted. Possibly that is more than were saved during the entire three and a half years of our Lord's public ministry.

This promise is not only for the small band of disciples, but for every true believer in every generation. There are some Christians who are doing these "greater works." But there are many, literally thousands among the saints in the body of Christ, who are doing little or no work for God in the sense of being witnesses to point the lost to the Saviour. Christ has given us all the essential equipment. We have His Spirit and His power. But one essential is lacking—a willingness to speak for Christ.

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it." These verses cannot be disassociated from the previous one. "Greater works" would be realized in the turning of literally thousands from sin and death unto Christ and eternal life. Such works, however, cannot be accomplished without prayer. There must be constant reliance on the Lord Jesus if we are to see the transformation of lives.

"If ye shall ask any thing in My name," Jesus says, "I will do

it." This is no blanket promise to get anything we want. God is too wise to answer prayers in such a manner. There have been many things for which we have prayed that would have resulted in serious harm, even though we were sincere in our praying. One important purpose for prayer is its benefit for the soul. Keep this in mind whenever you pray. There have been occasions when believers asked for money, but God withheld the answer, because money would have endangered the soul. There are times also when bodily healing would not be a blessing to the soul. God is all-wise in His provision and never makes any mistakes.

Our Lord prefaced the third promise by saying, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." Love for Christ was not to be expressed by words only, but by obedience to all that He said and taught, and there would be help to fulfill this responsibility. "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever." Christ's promise was distinctly different from the previous ministry of the Holy Spirit. Though He would go away, the Spirit would come and continue the ministry He began. This, of course, was a prophecy of Pentecost, when the Spirit would descend to indwell all who believed on Christ.

"Another Comforter" literally means "One who comes alongside of to help." The Spirit would come to be the believer's helper, "that He may abide with you for ever." The Lord Jesus would depart, but His own would never be left alone. "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." The Comforter was described as "the Spirit of truth" probably because it is He who makes the truth of God real to men. The ungodly have no interest in the Holy Spirit. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Unless one is sincere in his belief in Christ, he will not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

How different was the experience of the disciples. Jesus said, "But ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Blessed reality! The Holy Spirit dwells in those who love Jesus Christ. God says, "Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). How essential that every believer commit himself to the control of the Holy Spirit. We can do the "greater works" that Jesus promised only as the Holy Spirit has full and complete possession of us.

One time a group of clergymen were discussing whether or not they ought to invite Dwight L. Moody to their city for an evangelistic crusade. The success of the famed evangelist was brought to their attention. One unimpressed minister commented, "Does Mr. Moody have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" Another man quietly replied, "No, but the Holy Spirit seems to have a monopoly on Mr. Moody."

## THE PROOF OF LOVE

*John 14:18-26*

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." A paraphrase of our Lord's words would read, "I will not always be away from you. You will not remain as orphans, for I will come to you again and then you will be with Me forever."

"Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also." It would seem that Peter had this promise in mind when he wrote, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). The ungodly cannot see Christ through the eye of faith because they are blind in unbelief. Christ's followers walk by faith until death and then when He returns they shall be raised in His likeness to be with Him forever. "Because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in My

Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." "That day" refers to the day of our Lord's return. At that time, "Ye shall know," Jesus said. We shall understand all things.

"He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." In verse 15, our Lord made a similar statement to the eleven disciples. In verse 21 the application is to all Christians of every generation. The obligation to keep Christ's commandments is equally binding upon all who are Christ's true followers.

The obedient life is not without its rewards. "And he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." What could be more consoling than to be sustained by the loving favor of the Father and the Son? No greater reward could be realized than the joy of walking in harmony with God, overshadowed by His abounding love. Yet one tiny act of habitual disobedience could rob a believer of this joy.

"Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" This Judas was not the traitor who had departed from the upper room. Actually, it was Jude, the writer of the Epistle, the brother of James. It appears that Jude, like others, expected Christ to establish an earthly kingdom and then His true identity would be disclosed to everyone. Thus, he was confused when Christ spoke of manifesting Himself only to those who obeyed His commandments.

Our Lord restates what He had already declared in verses 15 and 21. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." Here He speaks of "words" rather than "commandments." "Words" would embody the full counsel of God as presented in the Scriptures. The believer is obligated to obey not only the commandments, but all revealed truth. "He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." This is the same truth stated negatively. Where obedience is lacking, love will be missing.

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). It is easier to offer sacrifices to God than it is to obey. But to satisfy the heart of God and to experience His love, there is no substitute for obedience to His revealed Word.

"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

The promise of the Spirit's teaching ministry was not for the disciples only, but for all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. "All things" refers to all that is essential to spiritual welfare and growth. One need not go beyond the Word of God and the Spirit's interpretation of the Word. What is recorded in God's Word had been made possible by the Holy Spirit: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him" (1 John 2:27). We have the inspired Word of God. But not only that, we have the Holy Spirit within to teach and instruct us in the Lord's way.

If you are not already in the habit, begin a regular and systematic study of God's Word. Do not rob yourself of the "all things" that are so essential and valuable for your spiritual growth. If you give the Bible the place it should have in your daily program, it is certain that you will say, as did David in Psalm 119:103, "How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

## GOD'S GIFT OF PEACE

*John 14:27-31*

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." This verse has often been referred to as Christ's legacy for His people. I prefer the comment of Milligan and Moulton, "The peace spoken of here is not the legacy of a dying father, but the salutation of a departing Master." Indeed, Christ is the Master of peace.

The phrase, "Peace I leave with you," was a frequent benediction among the Jews. But to many of them, this statement was a mere form or empty wish. How different it is with Christ. He spoke of peace not merely in the abstract but rather, "My peace."

No one but Jesus Christ could say, "*My peace I give unto you.*" We read in Ephesians 2:14 that Christ "is our peace." Christ could speak of "My peace" because He purchased it with His own blood. "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). Thus Christ can say, "Peace I leave with you," but He can also declare, "My peace I give unto you."

This peace is "not as the world giveth." The world offers a pseudopeace which proves to be no peace at all. In quest of the false peace of the world, foolish men and women burn out their lives, searching for it in money, fame, and pleasure, but never find that for which they search.

"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I." Even though our Lord was going away, He would return, not only following His resurrection but also after His ascension, to

rule and reign on earth. "If ye loved Me" does not mean that the disciples did not have any love for Christ, but rather, their love was not full and complete. If it had been, they would have rejoiced rather than being sad because Christ said, "I go unto the Father."

"I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I." Christ was referring not to His nature but to His present state. In His body of humiliation He differed from the glory of the Father. As the incarnate Christ, He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). But it would not be long until Christ would return unto the Father following His glorification, and then in His state as well as His nature He would be like the Father in His glory.

"And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." When these things were fulfilled, the disciples should not doubt nor be discouraged but be even more firm and confident in their belief. Christ made every preparation for His own, before He left, that their faith might not be shattered but built up and made secure in the promises of God.

"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." Time was short. The great conflict of the ages was about to take place in Gethsemane. "The prince of this world" would be the oppressor. During the days of His entire earthly ministry, Christ was assaulted and assailed by Satan's violent attacks. But this would be the evil one's greatest attempt to overthrow the work of God in seeking to get Jesus to sidestep the cross.

But notice the assuring word of triumph. Jesus said of the devil, he "hath nothing in Me." That is, he is not able to find any weakness in Me so that he might achieve victory. We read in Hebrews 4:15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet *without sin*."

None of us could say of Satan, he "hath nothing in me." No one mentioned in the Bible, other than the Lord Jesus, could ever say this. All of us have yielded to temptation. We have sinned, and it is true, as the apostle said, "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or more literally, "in the power of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). But our situation is not hopeless. "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). We who have been born again in Christ have every right to claim His power when confronted by the tempter.

"But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." Christ and His disciples arose and proceeded toward Gethsemane, where our Saviour proved His love for His Father in fulfilling His Father's commandment in offering up Himself for the sins of the world.

# 15

## ABIDING IN CHRIST

*John 15:1-6*

Evidently what is written in chapters 15 and 16 was spoken by our Lord to His disciples as they walked toward Gethsemane. The instruction began with the parable of the vine and the branches. Possibly, as they passed the Temple, Christ saw the golden vine that adorned the gate, and thus spoke of the True Vine. As this is a parable, we should consider the main details and not try to make everything fit into a theological mold. The general teaching is Christ living in and through the believer, giving him strength and power for all things.

Jesus declared, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." Some had taught that Judaism was the vine. Jews feared excommunication more than anything else. To a conscientious Jew, to be banished from the synagogue would mean being cut off from God.

Christ being the one True Vine could say, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." This sentence has disturbed many. For those who have denied the doctrine of eternal security, it has been a much-used proof text. Our Lord was speaking of what *appeared to be* branches in the vine: hypocrites who professed to follow Christ but their lives proved otherwise. Possibly our Lord had Judas in mind. Regardless of one's profession, if his life does not bear spiritual fruit it is evident that he has never been born again.

"And every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The fruitless branch is destroyed, while the fruitful branch is purged. God the Father does the purging, since He is the husbandman.

Pruning is essential for fruitbearing. Likewise, trials are

necessary for growth in grace. In Genesis 41:52 we read, "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." The Scriptures and our own experience tell us that it is not possible for a Christian to be fruitful without affliction.

One time a dear saint of God asked, "Why must I have all these heartaches and problems? If I am a child of God and if Christ is ever present, why doesn't He take care of me?" Of course, God was taking care of her. There is never a time when He does not care for His own. The fact of the trial is the evidence of His nearness and provision, that we might produce fruit.

There are times when the husbandman must come with his pruning knife and trim off all the hindrances to fruitbearing such as pride, selfishness, and unkindness. The pruning process must be repeated. The little shoots that are cut away soon reappear. Thus the husbandman goes to work again. Let us not complain about our trials, but realize that in every adversity God, our husbandman, is at work. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." The word "abide" here suggests a continuous struggle of clinging to God. It is to commit our load of care to Him and to trust Him for everything. If the servant of God does this, the result will be "fruit."

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." In verse 2 Christ speaks of "fruit," then "more fruit." Now it is "much fruit." This reminds us of growth in the Christian life. If one is abiding in Christ, he will go from "fruit" to "more fruit" to "much fruit."

But growth is of God. Jesus said, "For without Me ye can do nothing." No one can produce fruit apart from the power of Christ. We must live dependently every moment of every day. Paul declared in Romans 7:18, "For I know in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." What was true of Paul is true of each one of us.

"If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." This is not falling from grace, as some have taught. Again, Christ is speaking of the hypocrites, the mere professors of Christianity who have never entered into a living relationship with Him. They abide not in Christ because they are not really one with Christ. They go through the motions. But their fruitless lives provide the proof of their pretense. They are like dead branches lying on the ground, that are gathered up and burned. Among these will be church members, good people, many who have given generously of their means to others. But they lack the one essential—they have never entered into a heart relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. God says of them: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:10-11). What a grief-laden and remorseful future for those who are not abiding in the "True Vine."

### HAPPY CHRISTIANS

*John 15:7-11*

"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If one is to know the Christian life in its fullness, there must be constant abiding in Christ. The result will be unusual prayer power.

Some Christians have miraculous answers to prayer, while others know practically nothing of such experiences. What

makes the difference? Abiding in Christ! To abide in Him is to live in close communion and fellowship with Him. It is to confess all sin immediately, before it gets even the slightest hold. David declared in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." To regard iniquity in the heart is to continue habitually in an evil practice, to abide in sin rather than in Christ. The believer who permits sin to reign in his heart will rarely realize answers to prayer, for it is the yielded life that sees God work. James declared, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

To let God's Word abide in us is to obey His teachings, to follow His leading, and to do His will. This is more than having the Word of God in the mind; it must be given free course within the heart. The late Dr. Harry Ironside has written, "Some people, if they were cut off at the neck, would lose all the truth of God; but take off the heads of others and the truth would still be in the heart!" It is possible to have a mind impregnated with the truth but a heart that is empty.

"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." God's people are to be fruitful that the Father might be glorified, and that we might give conclusive proof of our discipleship. Christ is the vine in this parable; all the qualities that give life, and preserve it, come from Him. Of what value are branches shooting forth from the vine if they do not bear fruit? The fruitful believer honors God. Basically, this is the purpose of our salvation. Some think God saved us to keep us from hell and take us to Heaven. This is a result of our salvation. But a far greater purpose is that we honor God in lives of holiness and obedience. David declared in Psalm 86:12, "I will glorify Thy name for evermore." All believers have the same responsibility. As believers bear much fruit, they will demonstrate that they are Christ's disciples. "So shall ye be My disciples," He said.

"As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love." The highest love of all the universe is that of God the Father for God the Son. The Lord Jesus declared that He loves His followers with this same kind of love.

This love is not to be treated lightly. Jesus said, "Continue ye in My love." That is, "continue" to appreciate it and appropriate it. Do not take it for granted. Let it be the motive for every step taken, for every deed done, for every word spoken. Remember constantly that God loves you, and in everything prove your love for Him.

How can you do this? "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love." The Bible is a text book for holy living. If one does not spend time in the Word of God, obeying Christ's commandments, he will be an easy prey for the wicked one and he will drift from the love of God. But, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

As we do the things which Christ taught, we shall be happy Christians: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." We have His peace; we can also have His joy if we follow Him in obedience. Why not receive all that God has provided?

## FRIENDS OF GOD

*John 15:12-16*

"This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." Love among believers is a commandment.

Years ago God declared to the children of Israel, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). The Lord Jesus admonishes, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). In Galatians 6:2 the Apostle Paul declares, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The law of love that should undergird all our

relationships with others has never been changed. We are to love even as Christ has loved us.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Christ not only laid down His life for His friends, but for His enemies as well. For “*whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Whether friend or foe, the door is always open to *anyone* to receive Christ as Saviour and Lord, because of His great love that knows no bounds.

“Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” The proof of love is obedience. We are to believe the wonderful promises in the Word, but the commandments are to be obeyed. How quick we are to search the Scriptures for verses that bring comfort and help to our troubled hearts. But usually the promises found in the Word are conditional on obeying certain commandments.

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.” Think of it! You and I, though weak, faltering, stumbling disciples of Christ, are called His “friends.” The word “friend” here has a strong emphasis on “intimacy.” Christ had unburdened His heart to His disciples. He had divulged His future—the cross, the resurrection, His coming again. Such would not have been possible had His followers been mere servants. They were His friends, His loved ones, His very kin. What Christ’s disciples were, you and I are also.

Recall the occasion when someone approached Jesus, saying, “Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee” (Matthew 12:47). “He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For *whosoever* shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother” (Matthew 12:48-50). Christ is “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). Whatever our need, we can turn to our Friend.

Why not enter into the fullest possible enjoyment of your relationship to Christ? Take all your care to Him. Throughout the day, each day, turn to Him in prayer. Tell Him of your difficulties. Seek His leading and guidance. Many of us depend too much on human energy and ingenuity. The God of the universe wants to help us, but we forget about His power and grace. How we need to recognize our own deficiencies and His unlimited greatness.

"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you." The Apostle John was aware of this amazing truth, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We were following the paths of sin, but in His grace God intervened and drew us to Christ.

Not only were we chosen to everlasting life, but we were ordained to bring forth fruit. We have not been chosen of God merely to enjoy Christianity. We are to be fruitful. If we are not bearing fruit we are either deceiving ourselves or we are out of the will of God. For Jesus said, "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

An important phase of fruitbearing is to share our faith with those who need Christ. No Christian is excused from this responsibility. George Mueller said, "Use any and every opportunity which the Lord is pleased to give you. Seek to redeem the time, for you have but one life here on earth, and that is a brief life—a very brief one compared with eternity. Therefore, make good use of it. . . . On every occasion, under all circumstances, after we have sought the Lord's blessing and are in a proper state of heart, let us drop a word for Christ here and there and everywhere."

Remember that you are not alone! Our Lord says, "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you." The wisdom and power necessary for fruitbearing will be given to you if you are willing to receive it.

## SEPARATED LIVING

*John 15:17-21*

“These things I command you, that ye love one another.” God’s love is the undergirding principle of all our relationships, the bond that draws the people of God together into the oneness Christ desires for us. But there is another important need for God’s love, if we are to face a world of hate that despises the name of Christ.

Our Lord was hated and despised by the carnal worldly-wise of His day. Christians can expect no less. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.” Never pity yourself because the ungodly do not readily receive the gospel you proclaim. Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). There has never been a period in the history of the Church when the world has not poured out its wrath on those who follow Christ. The cross is an emblem that can never be erased, depicting the hatred of the natural mind toward the Son of God. Should the Christian fight back? Ah, no. There must never be any trace of the world’s hatred in him. Always, at any cost, he must obey Christ’s word, “These things I command you, that ye love one another.”

There are many ways to love. One of the most necessary is to be silent when falsely accused. When Christ was being tried before the chief priest and elders, nothing but lies were spoken against Him. When Pilate shouted, “Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee?” (Matthew 27:13) Jesus “answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly” (Matthew 27:14). How do you account for

this? There is only one answer—*His great love*. David prayed, “I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress” (Psalm 17:3). What a worthy petition!

We cannot expect an easy time as Christians in a world which as a whole is against Christ. Apart from the love of Christ, men and women do not have the restraining power to keep them from such wickedness. Accept such enmity graciously, realizing that “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” “The world” is anything that opposes God and holiness. It is the rule of the flesh in opposition to the rule of God. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” The Lord Jesus never thought of Himself, of His honor or of His ease. His one thought was always how He might glorify God and bless others. Self must be cast aside. Even more, it must be put under the death sentence of the cross.

Paul knew what this experience meant. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Many of God’s servants have entered into this experience. But probably more of them are still following along in the flesh-dominated life, which in reality is the self-life.

“But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Every believer is called to come out of the world. His identity with Christ should be easily recognizable. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Believers have been called out of the darkness of this world into the glorious light of a Christ-centered life. He should have the preeminence in everything, while the world loses its glamor and

appeal more and more. The more like Christ we become, the less we shall be desired by those of the world.

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.” Following their call to the apostolic office, before they were sent out to preach, Christ warned His disciples that the way would be difficult: “But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles” (Matthew 10:17-18). But He told them also that “the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord” (Matthew 10:24). As Christ suffered, so must we. But the Apostle Peter urges us to “rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).

“But all these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake, because they know not Him that sent Me.” It would be foolish to expect ungodly people to follow in the ways of God. They have no appreciation for that which is of eternal value. They will follow the dictates of their sinful natures. “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

But what about those of us who know Christ? There must be no bounds on our dedication to Him. We have powerless lives because of our failure to yield wholly to Christ. When Abraham departed from Ur, he broke with the past completely. He took his family, his goods, and left. He did not look back. He never returned. He did not permit his son to return to find a wife among his former associates. When Israel left Egypt, it was God’s purpose that this should be forever. There was to be no return nor alliance with Egypt. This is a principle which God has established for everyone who names His Name. Since we have been saved out of the world, there should be a complete break and departure from it. Lot’s tragic mistake was his half-hearted departure from the world. He failed to make

the complete break. As a result, he lost his entire family. His wife looked back to Sodom and became a pillar of salt. Later his children laughed and ridiculed his feeble commitment.

God says in Romans 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." This appears to me to be a call to every born-again believer. It is a challenge to give Christ the place He desires in our hearts, that the world and its lusts will be banished.

## WITHOUT EXCUSE

*John 15:22-27*

"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." This is not to suggest that they would not have been sinners had they not heard Him. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Their sin was intensified because of their unbelief. They were more guilty after having heard Christ present the truth. For this reason, "they have no cloak for their sin."

Failure to act upon spiritual truth results in greater condemnation. Think of the judgment that will be experienced by those reared in lands where the gospel has been preached who have done nothing about the claims of God. This is not to say that pagans in far-off heathen lands who have never heard the gospel will escape judgment, for even they have not obeyed the knowledge God has given in creation. Paul makes this clear in Romans 1:21-22: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." No one will be excused because he has never heard the truth. John 3:3 is clear: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the

kingdom of God." Whether one lives in darkest heathenism or in cultural refinement, there is only one way to be saved and that is by receiving Christ.

We have millions of Bibles in our land, and could we not say a great many of them are never read? What a tragedy that men who know the way, and others who have the possibility of knowing the way, have done nothing about it! "Now they have no cloak for their sin." They have brought themselves to judgment by their own neglect.

Consider, too, the children and young people being reared in Christian homes who fail to make a sincere commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. They go to church. Some of them are even active in the program of the church. But there is no real evidence of a heart transformation. The words of our Lord apply to them also, "Now they have no cloak for their sin." Many are rebellious, breaking the hearts of their parents. Some are even living in sin, in spite of having been reared in a Christian atmosphere and hearing the teachings of the Bible. Day by day, as they continue on in their rejection of our Lord, they are bringing themselves closer to judgment.

"He that hateth Me hateth My Father also." Here we see why it is such a serious offense to reject Christ. For he who rejects the Son of God, at the same time rejects God the Father. It is impossible to love the Father without loving the Son, for Jesus is the Son of God.

"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." The Lord Jesus proved Himself to be the Son of God by His "works." These were, as He said, "works which none other man did." Moses and the prophets performed miracles, but in no case could they compare with our Lord's, which were always done through His own power, while others were performed by delegated power. Christ's miracles exceeded the others in their greatness. There was no reason for the Jews to reject Him. They had not only heard His words but they had seen His works.

"But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled

that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause." Here is a prophetic word taken from one of the great Messianic psalms, Psalm 69. Unbelief among the Jews was ungrounded. They had all the evidence necessary for belief. But they hardened their hearts against the Lord. People in our day are no different. God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son. With all the knowledge we have of Christ, there are thousands who do nothing about it.

Think for a moment of Christ's early life. He was reared in the home of a carpenter, where He had no access to the great wisdom of the past. He knew little of the teachings of other lands. Humanly speaking, He was not an educated man, for He had no formal training. But at the age of thirty, He taught as no professor in any college or university has taught since. He never traveled, other than just around the cities and villages of a small fraction of the world. He gathered a few disciples around Him and preached for only several years. He was arrested, crucified, and buried. But He did not stay in the tomb. He rose again and later ascended into Heaven. His disciples, like Him, were soon put to death. What would happen to the influence of a mere man, reared in such circumstances? Doubtless you would never even hear of his name.

Christ was more than a man. How do I know? Since the time of His death and resurrection, the truth He taught has spread until hundreds of millions have taken His name with reverence upon their lips, and millions who have believed on Him would be willing to die rather than surrender the faith He put in their hearts. There is only one explanation for all this—Christ is the eternal Son of God.

Christ declared, "They hated Me without a cause." His worst enemies could find no evil in Him but they hated Him anyway. Since they persecuted Him they will also persecute us. But Christ assures us that we are not alone. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father He shall testify of Me." Not only does the Holy Spirit guide and lead us, but He testifies of Christ. If in any way He is prevented from

testifying of Christ, He is grieved. And the believer who grieves Him will be unhappy.

Not only would the Holy Spirit testify of Christ but He would do this through the people of God. "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning." In Romans 8:16 we read that "the Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." It is normal for the Holy Spirit to testify of Christ, but there is also a human side to the witnessing. The Christian who does not permit the Spirit to witness through him is resisting the Spirit. This is a serious evil, for the Spirit's work is being hindered.

John Knox cried out to God, "Give me Scotland or I die." It seemed that the Lord replied, "Die, and I will give you Scotland." Do you want power in your Christian life? Do you want to be effective for God? Die to yourself and your desires, that Jesus Christ might take full possession. Tell God you want Him to have full control, that you are willing to forsake all to follow Him. You may be sure that He will do the rest. If you are willing, God is even more willing.

# 16

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

*John 16:1-6*

It seems that the disciples were disturbed by our Lord's comment. But it was for their welfare: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." The word "offended" as used here means "stumbling" with a view to apostasy. Suffering and affliction and even death for His cause would be the experience of them all.

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Probably no greater shame could come to a Jew than excommunication. Even worse was the physical torture the disciples would face. One need only read the Acts of the Apostles to see the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Our destiny has been planned. It is not without suffering for Christ's sake. So with holy boldness, let us accept with praise and gratitude that which comes our way, giving thanks to God that we have been privileged to be soldiers of the cross.

"And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me." They have not had a personal encounter with the Son of God. Consequently, they have no relationship to the Father.

"But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." If the disciples were to remember that Christ had told them of "these things," such as suffering and persecution, then they would recognize His omniscience as never before. Had He not warned them, they might have lost faith and apostasized.

There is a message of comfort and consolation here for all true followers of Christ. Our Lord foresees all things. Nothing ever comes into the believer's life without His foreknowledge and permissive will. Thus the Apostle Peter wrote later, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12).

But even more wonderful, Christ provides the strength and help that enables us to bear the trials. What a consolation it must have been to the widow of Nain when Jesus said, "Weep not" (Luke 7:13). However well intended, the same words from loved ones and neighbors could not remove the cause of her tears. Because it was the Lord of Life who said, "Weep not," provision for her calamity was near at hand. The Lord Jesus raised her son to life again. Christ not only says, "Weep not," but He dries the tears and puts the peace of God within our hearts. Our Lord is not security against storms, but He is perfect security in the midst of storms.

"And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you." The disciples did not need the warning at the beginning of Christ's ministry. The antagonism toward Him was not as great, and they had His presence with them. But now He was to leave and they were to become the objects of hatred and scorn. They were to leave their school of discipleship and go out and face the hardship and privation of loneliness and toil.

"But now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?" It is true that Peter had asked "Whither goest Thou?" (John 13:36) but doubtless his question was more the response of his curiosity than a desire to know more about the place to which Jesus was going. The disciples' main concern seemed to be that Christ was forsaking them. "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart." They felt all was coming to an end. The future seemed hopeless. But Christ made it plain that they should be more interested in the glories of the future than in looking upon the shadows of the present.

Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." How easy it is to keep our eyes on our present calamity, failing to see the glory that is yet to come. Is it not true that most of us look to our trials rather than to the glory of God? We have a great God. The Lord Jesus never forsakes His own, though we forsake Him frequently. Let us rest in the promises He has given us in His Word, looking not to our trials but to Him, realizing that "There hath no testing taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be [tested] above that ye are able; but will with the [testing] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

## THE SPIRIT'S MINISTRY

*John 16:7-15*

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." "Comforter" means "helper." In Romans 8:26 we read, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." The child of God would never be alone for there would be a mighty Helper to lead through every calamity of life.

Why it was essential for the Lord to depart before the Comforter would come, we do not know; we can only conclude that this was the plan of an all-wise and gracious God. Let us not misconstrue the Scripture, however, to think that the Holy Spirit was not at work in the world until Pentecost. The Spirit has always been here, for without Him it would have been

impossible for one to become a believer. But following the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit came upon men in a new and unusual way. His presence was so obvious that enemies of the cross declared of several of the disciples, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6).

Notice an important phase of the Holy Spirit's mission in the world: "And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." While the Spirit's particular ministry to His Church is that of Helper, to the world and the unsaved He is the Reprover, convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

"Of sin, because they believe not on Me." The worst sin in all the world is failure to believe on Christ, rejection of God's Son. This sin nailed Jesus to the cross. The Holy Spirit came to convict lost and dying men of this sin, that they might be saved and have everlasting life.

"Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Apart from the experience of salvation, man has no righteousness of his own. The Prophet Isaiah said, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). God is the only righteous One. The Holy Spirit has come to convince a lost world of the righteousness of Christ. Of course, before one can be convinced of his need of righteousness, he must be convinced of his sinfulness; thus the Holy Spirit came into the world first of all to convince men "of sin," then "of righteousness."

But this is not all: "of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." This refers not only to future but to present judgment. Every unbeliever is under the judgment of God at this moment. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

We see three great facts which the Holy Spirit is making known to the unsaved in our day. First, they are sinners and need to be saved. Secondly, Christ has provided righteousness for believers through His death and resurrection. Thirdly, the result of unbelief is continued and ultimate judgment. How essential that attention be given to this important ministry of the Holy Spirit.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Christian truth is progressive. One does not master the contents of the Bible by one reading. He must read it over and over again, searching the Scriptures, seeking to get the message of God. Each time we read the Bible we see new truths. As we grow in grace, we are made more ready to receive God's teachings.

"Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come." The teaching process would continue even though Christ would depart. The Holy Spirit would be not only a Helper and a Convicter but a Teacher. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The Holy Spirit has all knowledge, for He "searcheth all things." Likewise, He reveals to those who are yielded to His control all that is essential for us to know of spiritual truth.

The Holy Spirit "will show you things to come." Prophecy seems to be a subject of extreme confusion to many. It is not confusing to the Holy Spirit. As we study prophecy with Spirit-controlled hearts and minds, God's future plans for the world and humanity will become discernable.

Preeminently, the Holy Spirit makes Christ more real and precious to us. Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of

Mine, and shall show it unto you." A Spirit-filled life will always be a Christ-centered life. It seems to be the very special ministry of the Holy Spirit, as far as believers are concerned, to make Christ more wonderful to us. It is God's eternal purpose for all believers to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). God desires each of us to be more like Christ. The Spirit did not come to "speak of Himself," but rather, to glorify the Saviour.

It may be that the Holy Spirit has been working in your heart, endeavoring to draw you from the things that have turned you away from Christ. The Spirit has been pleading with you to "come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Corinthians 6:7). Maybe you have been too busy to hear His voice, or because of the practice of a certain sin, you have resisted His wooings. Hear the words of the Apostle Paul, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13). This is the Holy Spirit's concern for you, that you will yield wholly to Christ and His control.

### COMFORT AMIDST SORROW

*John 16:16-24*

"A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father." There seems to be a double meaning here. First, in all probability our Lord was referring to His death which would take place on the next day. But it would be only a matter of "a little while" and He would be raised from the dead and would appear unto His disciples again. It seems also that the verse is prophetic. The phrase "a little while" is used seven times in the next several verses. Recall Hebrews 10:37 where we find the same phrase,

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Surely, Jesus spoke of the cross, but also of His ascension and later His coming again, when He would return to rule and reign in the world.

"Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith." By this time they should have begun to understand, for our Lord had spoken of His second advent before. They were so slow to believe the truth.

You and I have been guilty of this same failure. How important it is that we be men and women of the Word of God, taking time to study the Scriptures. Not only studying, but believing the Scriptures. As we sincerely ask the Holy Spirit to make the truth clear and plain, He will do this.

"Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?" Our Lord always understands the confusing questions that provoke our minds. "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

The disciples were confused. They really wanted to discuss it with Christ but they did not. This was a serious mistake. Rather than talk the matter over among themselves, they should have asked Christ what He meant. This is a common weakness among the people of God. Rather than spending time waiting on our wonderful Lord and submitting all our questions to Him, we turn to our friends, seeking their advice. It is not that spiritual men cannot give profitable and wise counsel, but "the LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). God does not always speak at the moment we think He should. But as we seek His guidance, soon we get the answer.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Here again we see both a historical and prophetic meaning. After Christ was crucified, His own beloved ones wept and lamented His death. The ungodly Jews rejoiced over Christ's death, thinking that He had been destroyed and banished from this world forever. The Jews had declared, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). They felt confident that their goal had been achieved. But how wrong they were. Christ arose. After three days and three nights He was back on the scene again. The sorrow of the disciples was "turned into joy." "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).

The prophetic meaning has to do with the second advent. In our present day Christians are going through a time of weeping and lamenting, while the world laughs and rejoices in iniquity. As it was at the time of the crucifixion, so it is now. The ungodly hate and despise Christ and usually feel the same toward those who follow Him. Oftentimes God's people find themselves perplexed and confused, as the result of trials and testings. Jesus said, "Ye shall be sorrowful." But our sorrow will not continue forever. It "is but for a moment" (2 Corinthians 4:17) in comparison to an eternity with Christ. Jesus said, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

"A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." God's people are going through a period of travail, but deliverance is near. "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." This will be the consummation of all things when our blessed Lord returns. Thus with expectancy, as a mother looks forward to the birth of her child, every true believer should look forward to the return of Christ.

"And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing." At that time we shall be like Christ. We shall know all things. Though we face many times of sorrow while waiting for His return, we are not

without help. We have a unique privilege as believers: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." As we call upon Him by faith, we shall receive answers to our prayers.

Of course, what is said in this verse must be considered in the light of other passages of Scripture. For example, "whatsoever is to be understood as that which glorifies God and honors Christ. Petitions directed to God without this thought in mind are worthless. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). Selfish praying does not glorify God. Answers cannot be expected unless we meet the conditions for prayer.

"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Until then the disciples had not recognized Jesus as their mediator between their Heavenly Father and themselves. They had looked upon Him as the prophesied Messiah, the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," their Lord, their Provider, their Strength, but they had not yet realized He was their Mediator. They must now pray to the Father in His Name. If they did, not only would they receive answers to their prayers, but their hearts would be blessed with His overwhelming joy.

What Christ promised the disciples is for us also. We read in Philippians 4:6-7: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It is this peace that provides joy as the result of prayer. Regardless of the circumstances, as the saint believes God and commits his way unto Him, Christ gives peace and joy that sustains his soul. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

## CHRIST'S ENDURING PEACE

*John 16:25-33*

Christ concluded His farewell discourse with several statements that are difficult to understand. Verses 25 through 33 are not without mystery. We shall delve as deeply as the Holy Spirit may permit, but we must depend wholly on Him for His wisdom.

There seems to be a distinct shift of thought between verses 24 and 25. "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father." What "time" was Christ speaking about? Was it the forty days between His resurrection and ascension or the church age following His ascension and continuing until His return?

The evidence points to the latter, for what Christ taught His disciples following His resurrection was not in general any different from His previous teaching. But since our Lord departed and since the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the Third Person of the Trinity has been anointing the hearts and minds of followers of God with spiritual understanding. Though the Scriptures have not been changed, yet more and more the Holy Spirit seems to be unfolding the truth before our eyes as prophecies are fulfilled and as the works of God are manifested.

The word for "proverbs" here could also be translated "parables," referring to something which appears obscure or difficult to understand. Frequently the Old Testament prophets did not comprehend what they wrote, yet through the enlightenment that Christ gave, the disciples were able to understand. Jesus said in Matthew 13:17, "For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

Christians of our day are able to "see" and "hear" many things which Christ's disciples were not able to discern. 1 John 2:27 gives the reason, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." As men and women yield themselves to Christ's control, the Holy Spirit makes the things of God real to them.

"At that day ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God." Because the Holy Spirit not only prompts believers to pray, but also leads us in our specific requests, it is unnecessary for Christ to plead to the Father for these requests. "And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He [the Spirit] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). Prompted by the Holy Spirit, we have the privilege in Christ of going to the Father directly. This is based upon God's love for us, our love for Christ, and our belief in the deity of the Lord Jesus.

Let us consider these three requisites. First, prayer is made possible through the love of God. None of us deserves answers to prayer. Like our salvation, prayer is the result of God's unchangeable love. Then, those who would reach into Heaven to enjoy the blessings of prayer must love Christ. To love Christ means obedience to Christ, a constant willingness to submit to His control. Finally, we must believe in Christ as the incarnate Son of God, the One who came from Heaven, born of a virgin, to die on the cross and rise again to be the redeemer of all who believe on Him. Those who pray thus will find the windows of Heaven opened and a continuous stream of blessing.

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." Our Lord's statement seemed to clarify some of the confusion in the minds of the disciples. They said, "Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by

this we believe that Thou camest forth from God." But considering the events that transpired a little later, one wonders if they believed more with the head than with the heart. Faced with persecution and possible death, they doubted.

Christ realized the superfluity of their statement, thus His question: "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." Soon the disciples revealed the weakness of the flesh and shallowness of their belief. At the hour of Christ's greatest need, they forsook Him and fled. How important it is that we permit the great searcher of hearts to examine us to reveal our inconsistencies to us, so that we might say with sincerity of heart, "Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Christ reminded His beloved ones of their lack of confidence and trust in Him, as well as the danger of profession as opposed to practice. Now He reveals why He spoke in this manner. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace." The disciples were to face many trying days. But if they could keep their minds and hearts stayed on Christ, His wonderful peace would be their reward.

All of us need this peace for "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Neither believers nor unbelievers are excluded from the tribulation of the world. We shudder at the thought of being plunged into sorrow, sadness, and tragedy. But it is to be expected. Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." But He did not stop there: "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." To know Christ has "overcome the world" is indeed a message of cheer and consolation.

When Jesus said, "I have overcome the world," He was speaking of the great victory to be achieved in a matter of hours, when "the prince of this world" would be cast out (John 12:31). Satan was to become a defeated foe so that victory could be provided for all who would fully trust Christ. Though surrounded with tribulation, one may possess perfect peace within, because his relationship to Christ, the Son of God.

# 17

## GLORIFY THY SON

*John 17:1-8*

John 17 is one of the most sublime chapters in the Bible, the high priestly prayer of our Lord. The prayerful reading of it is as though one "were passing through the vail into the holiest of all." The time appears to be the eve of the crucifixion. Though Christ prayed frequently, this is one of His few recorded prayers. It is the longest prayer in the New Testament and should be recognized as the true "Lord's prayer."

It was said that "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). We may also conclude that never man prayed like this Man. How gracious of the Holy Spirit to provide for our instruction this unusual prayer of the Son communing with the Father. Because it is voiced by God the Son to God the Father, we must realize that there is much in the content that no human mind can fully understand.

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven." The Son of Man lifting up His eyes to Heaven suggests the ruling out of every human thought that might detract. "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." The long-awaited hour of history when the Son of Man would lay down His life, to provide redemption for all who should believe, had finally come. Repeatedly Christ had declared, "Mine hour has not come." But now it had arrived. The heart of the Son of God was heavy with the weight of the world's sin resting upon Him. The fact that Christ had a specific time to die suggests the certainty of the plan of God. He could not die before His hour.

What was true of our Lord is also true of those who love

Him. Can life be snatched from God's servants before their appointed hour? Most certainly not. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15). Would even a faltering human be careless of that which is precious? Is God any less careful of His own blood-bought children? He is not. We are "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). And that power will keep us until in the providence of God the hand of death is permitted to lift us into glory.

Christ's first petition was, "Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." This embodies both the equality that existed between the Father and the Son, and the loving submission of the Son to permit the divine plan to be fulfilled. The chief end of this would be that men and women of every generation would have the possibility of being saved.

"As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." The Father committed all power to the Son, as Jesus said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Not only does Christ possess the power to save the lost, but also to keep them saved. He gives "*eternal life* to as many as" the Father gives Him.

What is eternal life? "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Eternal life is to know God the Father and Jesus His Son. The word "know" as used here means more than having knowledge. It involves commitment to the control of the Father and Son. It implies obedience, reverence, and submission. If one comes to "know" God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son, it will be evidenced in a holy life. Believers are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). If one who professes to be a follower of God through Christ does not produce "good works," his salvation is doubtful.

"I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." There was never a time during His earthly sojourn when Christ did not glorify the Father.

Followers of Christ have this obligation. Paul said, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2). The Holy Spirit has engraved on the heart of every believer, "HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD." There is no provision for believers to continue in known sin after being redeemed by the Son of God.

Christ "finished the work" which God gave Him to do, the work of redemption. Christ came to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). He "finished" His work by providing eternal salvation. Is there not a reminder there for those of us who love Him to guard against the satanic evil of procrastination in our labors for Christ?

"And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." One can pray, "glorify Thou me," only after he has "finished the work" which God has given him. Those Christians who live for self, who are not earnestly sharing their faith, know nothing of the glory of the Lord.

"I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word." Here Christ speaks of His disciples, not only the original eleven, but all those who would follow Him during ensuing generations. "Name" has to do with God's attributes and character. Christ made the Father known to His followers in a way in which He had never been known before. Christ had lived with the Father throughout eternity. He manifested the name of the Father; that is, He made known the Father's desires for men, His plan of salvation, as well as future glory in Heaven. This knowledge was given to those whom the Father had given to Him. "Thine they were" by creation, but the Father gave them to the Son by re-creation through the new birth.

Our Lord made a most gracious remark regarding the disciples, "They have kept Thy word." Consider how they failed in this respect, and even worse, how they would fail after Christ's crucifixion. But our Lord is so loving and kind. He

overlooked their many weaknesses as He said, "They have kept Thy word."

"Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me." The disciples had finally come to believe and accept the truth which they did not receive for a long time after Christ had begun His public ministry. They "received" His teachings, but even more, they "believed." Not only did they accept what Christ taught, but they trusted in Him as the Lord of their lives.

## OUR SUPREME OBJECTIVE

*John 17:9-16*

From verse 9 to the end of the chapter, our Lord prays specifically for His disciples. "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine." This does not mean that Jesus never prayed for the world. As He hung on the cross His words were heard by His bitterest enemies, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). But there is a unique sense in which He prays for His own blood-bought people. "He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Our Lord said to the wavering Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). The unpredictable Peter was sustained through all of his temptations by Christ's intercession. No such prayer was offered for Judas because Judas was of "the world."

"And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am

glorified in them." What security we realize from this verse. We speak about the perseverance of the saints, but is it not rather the perseverance of the Father and the Son in keeping us, that the Son might be glorified through us? Reading these convincing words of promise, how can anyone imagine losing his salvation? Indeed, in the words of Luther, this is "a bulwark never failing."

It has been said that before a redeemed soul can be lost, five things must happen: (1) he must be plucked out of God's hand (John 10:29); (2) the seal of ownership which made us God's purchased possession must be broken (Ephesians 1:13-14); (3) the indwelling Holy Spirit must be cast out (John 14:16); (4) we must be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39); (5) our names must be erased from the Lamb's book of life (Luke 10:20).

To be sure, it will not be possible to do any of these, for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14) and they will never be anything other than the sons of God. This is true for the simple reason that salvation is not dependent upon us, but upon the provision of Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The Christ who saved us will keep us saved, for He will glorify Himself in us.

In the next verse, our Lord prays as though He had already been to the cross, died, risen again, and ascended into Heaven: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are." Christ prayed that His people might at all times be drawn together in the same oneness in which the Father and Son dwell. This is a plea for unity among the people of God, that they might stand together as they face their common enemy.

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." One might conclude from this verse that all who had been given to the Son were kept saved with the exception of

Judas, of whom it was prophesied that he would betray Christ. This is not the meaning. Judas had not been given to Christ for salvation. He was "the son of perdition"; not because Scripture prophesied that he would be, but by his actions he proved that the Scriptures which foretold his betrayal were true. God did not foreordain that Judas be a betrayer, even though He foreknew and foresaw that he would be. Thus many centuries before Judas was born, God through the Holy Spirit recorded in the Scriptures the actions of one who would resist and rebel against the grace of God.

This verse and scores of others in the Bible make it clear that those who have believed on Christ will be "kept" by Christ. The word "kept" is used twice, *to preserve*; secondly, *to guard as a soldier guards a treasure*. Those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ are not only guided and directed by His mercy, but they are protected from the evil one and kept by His grace.

"And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves." Apart from a saving relationship with the Son of God, there is no real promise of joy in life. David said of his Redeemer, "And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Psalm 40:3). The believer has a song regardless of his circumstances because he has Christ, the Son of God. Even though we may be surrounded by sorrow and tragedy, we may rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Thus we are told in Psalm 68:3, "Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." This is only possible as we know the Lord and live in fellowship with Him.

"I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." There was a time when the world loved Christ's followers because in their practices they readily identified with the world. But a miraculous transformation took place and they were different. Those of the world have no time for God. They are opposed to holiness and truth. Because the disciples followed Christ and not the world, those who at one time were their friends hated and despised them.

"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," or more literally, "the evil one." It would be wonderful to believe on Christ and then be snatched away from this world and transported into the glory of Heaven. Think of it! No persecution, suffering, or trial of any kind, but only eternal bliss in the presence of the Son of God. But Christ prayed rather that though we are in the world we should be kept from the power of the devil and sin.

## ONE IN CHRIST

*John 17:17-26*

Christ prayed not only for the preservation of His own amidst their trials and testings, but also that they might be stalwart and courageous in a world of ungodliness. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." To "sanctify" means to set apart for a specific purpose, to become more like God, while evidencing less of the characteristics of the world, that every believer might exalt Christ and make His name known. Without holiness of life this is impossible.

The process of sanctification is effected through the truth. How essential it is to spend time reading and studying the Word of God. Come to the Word with an open mind and open heart. The Bible is more than a book of information. Those who study it with the head only can never know its effectiveness. The heart must be open to the pleadings and leadings of the Holy Spirit.

"As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Christ came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." To provide salvation for the lost, our Lord had to go to the

cross and lay down His life. He was "sanctified," or set apart, for this purpose. Because of His sacrifice, sanctification is made possible for His followers. This fact is made clear in Titus 2:14: Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The believer's sanctification is based upon Christ's sanctification. His, of course, never refers to becoming more holy, for He was perfectly holy. Christ's sanctification always means set apart for the work of redemption. Because He was set apart for this work, not only was provision made for our salvation, but for our holiness of life as well, our sanctification. How we need to search our hearts before Him to be sure that every trace of disobedience and ungodliness be expelled, that the holiness of the Lord might be revealed through us.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word. That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Oneness seemed to be the burden on the heart of our Lord on the eve of His crucifixion. Soon, by means of the cross, He would bring men and women of every race and culture into a oneness unknown apart from Him. As unbelievers see Christians bound together in love, they will be convinced that the Founder of Christianity was sent from God the Father. There is no stronger argument for the reality of the Christian faith. It was said of the early Christians, "How they love one another." What does the world say of present-day Christianity?

Have you received the Son of God into your heart and life? If so, then you are obligated to love your neighbor, regardless of what he has done to you. God exhorts us to "owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Love is a must in the Christian life. You cannot know the blessing of God without it. The closer you get to Jesus Christ, the closer you will get to your neighbors. If you are spiritually cold, with little interest in the things of God, you will express the same attitude to those

around you. Do not be a stumbling block. Let Christ manifest His great love for others through you.

"And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." Those who believe on Christ are the recipients of His glory. Some interpret "glory" to mean the Holy Spirit; that as Christ was empowered by the Spirit, so are His followers. It would seem, however, that the glory of the Lord as used here has to do with the power of God. Of course, the Holy Spirit is the source of our power. But God's glory seems to be the power to overcome sin as well as to face reverses and trials. Paul said in Romans 5:3, "We glory in tribulations." God gives us the power and endurance to overcome the afflictions of life.

"I in them, and Thou in Me." Think of it, the Son of God indwells us if we have trusted in Him. What have we to fear? We have within us the presence of the eternal, almighty Son of God. No wonder Paul wrote, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). Why do we complain? Why do we become disturbed? Christ is in us. It was this great truth that Paul stressed when he wrote to the Galatians, "Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). This is how he could bear the severe afflictions and persecutions that confronted him.

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." This is the final petition in our Lord's prayer. Here we get some insight into Christ's desire for you and for me. It is His concern that His people be loving and kind while at all times recognizing His enabling presence.

# 18

## THE GARDEN OF GRIEF

*John 18:1-11*

As we leave our Lord's high priestly prayer and pass into chapter 18, it is as though we are going from the light of day into the darkness of night. Christ now faces the closing hours of His earthly life in the suffering and the anguish of the cross.

"When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which He entered, and His disciples." There can be no question about this garden being Gethsemane, which is said by some to mean "oil press," where the oil was pressed from olives. Here, the Son of God was to feel as never before the pressure of the sin of the world. It was in a garden that the first Adam fell, but it was also in a garden that the second Adam won the victory that made eternal redemption available for all.

Though John was one of the eyewitnesses to our Lord's agony in the garden, he had little to say about it. The other gospelers tell us how Christ agonized in prayer. Luke the physician describes this awful experience: "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Probably John had nothing to say about Gethsemane because his primary concern was to present the Lord Jesus as God's eternal Son and not necessarily as the suffering Saviour.

"Judas also, which betrayed Him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons." It is worth while to note that the soldiers sent by the

chief priests were Sadducees. Though theologically and politically divided, Sadducees and Pharisees boldly united in this common purpose for evil. Both were determined to put an end to Jesus Christ. And just think, one who had been with Jesus for three and a half years, bearing the name of disciple, was a tool in the hands of our Lord's enemies!

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?" They were well equipped with lanterns and torches, for they expected to search among the rocks and caves to find Jesus. What a surprise they must have received to see the Lord Jesus approaching them.

When the multitudes wanted to make Jesus their king He hid Himself. But when His persecutors came to make Him their captive to crucify Him on a cross, He voluntarily surrendered Himself to them. How do we explain this? Christ is the Son of God! Who could question His deity as we consider His divine action here? The first Adam hastened to hide after partaking of the forbidden fruit. The second Adam had no reason to hide, for He was sinless.

In answer to Christ's question, "Whom seek ye?" His captors replied, "Jesus of Nazareth," or more literally, "Jesus the Nazarene." Matthew and Mark tell us that Judas had given the men a sign so that they might know Jesus when they saw Him—"Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: hold Him fast" (Matthew 26:48). Jesus replied to the band of men, "I am He." The pronoun "He" does not appear in the original. It is simply "I am." This is Christ's Old Testament name which was used on numerous occasions.

The next sentence is one of great tragedy. "And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them." For several years this professed disciple stood with Christ. Now as a brazen traitor he takes his position with the devil's crowd.

The instant our Lord declared His identity by the words, "I am," a miracle took place. "As soon, then, as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground." This was the fulfillment of Psalm 27:2, "When the wicked,

even Mine enemies and My foes, came upon Me to eat up My flesh, they stumbled and fell." How long the multitude remained lying on the ground we are not told. Doubtless they clamored to their feet as quickly as possible, bewildered and amazed.

Christ cast the men to the ground. He could have cast them into hell. With love, He dealt with them mercifully, giving them a chance to repent with the realization that Jesus was the Son of God. Again Christ asked them, "Whom seek ye?" But there was no change and they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Our Lord declared, "I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none." While about to be taken captive and crucified, Christ had in mind the temporal welfare of His disciples. In His high priestly prayer, our Lord had prayed, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12). That concerned the eternal welfare of His disciples, but here obviously He had in mind their temporal welfare.

It appears that at this point Judas stepped forward to kiss our Saviour with the superficial greeting, "Hail, master" (Matthew 26:49). Probably it was this kiss that led to Peter's impetuous response when Malchus stepped up to arrest the Lord Jesus. "Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear." Peter had no doubt tried to split Malchus' head open, but nervous and excited, he missed his mark. One wonders what might have happened had Peter killed the high priest's servant at this crucial time. Can we not conclude that it was Christ's preserving grace that prevented such a calamity?

Immediately our Lord applied a truth He frequently taught: "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). With tenderness Christ came to the aid of the wounded servant—"He touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22:51). Then rebuking Peter sternly He

said, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" God's work is not to be done with a sword. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). The only sword believers may wield is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

Those who are most active and demonstrative for God are not always the most spiritual. Peter's action suggested devotion and courage, but only a short while later, with the same human energy, he denied that he even knew Christ. The other apostles did not, like Peter, take a bold stand when Christ was about to be arrested, nor did they deny their Lord later, like Peter. How we need to guard against the flesh and its selfishness. Surely all of us are guilty of acting like Peter. Who could begin to estimate the number of "ears" that have been restored by Christ because you and I have cut them off? Careless and indifferent, because of our carnal natures, we have been thoughtless of others and have said many things sharper than Peter's sword. For this reason, we must live moment by moment dependent upon the strength and the power of the Son of God.

## THE FEARLESS AND THE FEARFUL

*John 18:12-27*

From what transpired in the garden thus far, one would think there would have been an immediate acknowledgment of Christ as the Son of God. But what do we see? "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him." Think of it, the creatures tying up the Creator! This was the first time our Lord had ever permitted anyone to restrict Him. Passively, He offered Himself as a willing subject to man's sinful intent. Actually, He had been bound long before they came—bound by His love for them.

From the darkness of the garden, they "led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year." John is the only gospel writer who tells us of Christ being taken before Annas, though he omits the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, which is depicted by Matthew and Mark. "Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." From this statement it is obvious that no justice would be shown to Christ. Guided by the Spirit, John was directed to remind us that Caiaphas was the one who had declared the amazing prophecy "that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." Even though Christ was bound by wicked men and rushed before the Sanhedrin for judgment, there was no sign of defeat, for this was but the fulfillment of the eternal purposes of God.

What happened to the disciples after our Lord was hurried into the courtroom? "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without." John skips over the fact that all the other disciples fled at this point, but obviously several of them, including Peter, turned to follow along to see what would happen to Christ. One of the other writers tells us that Peter followed "afar off" (Mark 14:54). Who the other disciple was that followed along, no one knows. Some seem to think it was John. How he was known to the high priest cannot be explained.

Whoever the other disciple was, he went into the palace with Jesus while Peter stayed outside. Not seeing Peter in the palace, the disciple asked the doorkeeper to let Peter in. Scrutinizing Peter, the doorkeeper asked, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" There is no intimation that she was angry or asked the question for an ulterior motive. What a shocking reply Peter gave, as boldly he shouted, "I am not." This lie, this flat denial of any relationship to Christ, was by one who only a little while before had jerked his sword from its sheath and swung a sweeping blow at the one who commanded that Christ should be bound.

Not long before, when Christ asked, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matthew 16:13) Peter was quick to reply, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). It would seem that such a declaration could only be followed by a life of unwavering devotion. But look what happened when the crucial test came. How necessary that we recognize the frailty of human flesh. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Peter's descent into defeat took place after the wonderful mountaintop experience of partaking of the Lord's Supper. This is frequently the case. Following some spiritual peak in our Christian experience, we often become careless. Satan strikes with all of his diabolical fervor, and down the believer goes. There is never a time when we can remove our eyes from our Lord. If for a second we do not depend upon our victorious Christ, defeat is certain.

"The servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold, and they warmed themselves; and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself." When a man turns his face from Christ, he is no longer careful about the company he keeps. Not only did Peter deny Christ, but he identified himself with those who were preparing to crucify Christ. It is one thing to turn from the Saviour, but far worse to live with the enemy.

Was not Peter as bad as Judas? There is a difference in their status. Peter was a backslider while Judas was an apostate. A backslider is one who has believed but has drifted from fellowship with his Lord. The apostate has never believed. Though at times he may give the appearance of being a believer, yet he has not sincerely received Christ. Thus we may conclude that Peter was in a backslidden condition which could only be changed by repentance and confession to Christ.

Our Lord was taken before Annas. This was His preliminary trial in the home of the high priest before being tried before the entire Sanhedrin. "The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine." He wanted to know how many

disciples there were, where they were from, and what their names were. Furthermore, he was concerned about what Jesus and His disciples had been teaching. This was to detect heresy or subversion, that they might readily condemn Him.

Notice the clear-cut and direct reply, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said." Obviously this was interpreted as disrespect, for immediately "one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?" This action by an officer of the court gives some insight into the low level to which the courts had degenerated in the day of our Lord. If one were to offer any defense whatsoever, he was judged immediately to be wrong.

"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?" This was a call for equality and justice which had been offered theoretically in the ecclesiastical courts for centuries. Christ was saying, "If I have done wrong, prove it; but do not strike Me without evidence."

The next verse has caused much difficulty. "Now Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest." The question is whether the examination of the previous few verses took place in the presence of Annas or Caiaphas. It would seem that it took place in the home of Annas. Thus the preliminary trial having been completed, Annas sent Jesus to be tried by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

"And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself." Peter was still standing by the fire among the enemies of our Lord trying to get warm. By this time, those who sat around the fire had a better opportunity of observing Peter. The question was raised, "Art not thou also one of His disciples?" As before, Peter denied it and said, "I am not." But there was one person in the audience who could not possibly forget Peter, a relative of the man "whose ear Peter cut off." He asked, "Did not I see thee in the garden with Him?" And for the third time Peter sought to

clear himself of any relationship with Christ. "Peter then denied again; and immediately the cock crew." The Lord Jesus had declared, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice" (Matthew 26:34).

What a warning to all of us. We who are supposed to be stalwart followers of our Lord fail Him so many times. When we have opportunities to witness to His saving grace, how sheepish and timorous we are. Rather than speak up for our Saviour, we choose to be silent Christians. Let us tell the world what Christ has done in redeeming us from corruption and eternal death.

## ART THOU A KING?

*John 18:28-40*

John skips over the details of the examination before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and resumes the account with Jesus being taken before Pilate. Since the earlier writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, had described the trial before the Sanhedrin, there was no need of this being repeated. Furthermore, since John wrote his Gospel to the Gentiles, he was especially interested in what took place before a Gentile governor.

"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover." "The judgment hall" refers to the governor's palace. It was here that the Jews brought Jesus, for they had done all that they could do with Him.

One cannot read verse 28 without sensing the utter inconsistency of unregenerate hearts. Here were Jesus' accusers hastening to perform the most heinous of all crimes, the murder of the Son of God. And yet, they quibbled over

ridiculous religious ceremony. If a Jew were to take two steps over a Gentile threshold at the time of the passover, he was considered unclean, so they could not enter into Pilate's palace. Jesus said of them on a former occasion, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:23-24).

Like them, there are professing Christians who are punctilious in the observance of outward ceremonies, such as the communion service, church going, fasting, and even Bible reading, while at the same time they are guilty of sins and immoralities. They are as culpable as the Jews who were attempting to put Jesus to death. It is not what we do by ceremony that "becometh" God; it is holiness that exalts Him.

Realizing that the Jews could not come into his palace, "Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?" The Roman governor wanted to know the charge against Christ. Sarcastically, "They answered and said unto him, If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee." The Jews had gone as far as they could in their court. They had found Christ guilty of death, but being subjects of the Romans they could not kill Him. Consequently, they hastened to Pilate to get him to pass sentence on Jesus.

For a clearer understanding, we should consider their reply in Luke 23:2, which was omitted by John. "And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King." Evidently John was aware of this statement, for in verse 33 he quotes Pilate as asking, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?"

It would be practically impossible for Pilate not to know of the Lord Jesus, since Christ's miracles were the talk of the land. But if Pilate had some thoughts about Christ as the Son of God, he was unwilling to take a stand. He said, "Take ye Him, and

judge Him according to your law." Pilate was like many in our day who just look the other way. They do not jeopardize their position in society by speaking out against sin: they turn their heads.

Pilate considered the charge to be minor, thus the Jews should handle the problem themselves. But Christ's angry persecutors were not satisfied with Pilate's decision. They were determined that their captive should be killed. Thus they replied, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." The Romans had taken this privilege from the Jews. John tells us that it was spoken "that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spake, signifying what death He should die." Stoning was the method used by the Jews to carry out the death penalty, while the Romans adhered to crucifixion. Here we see another of the many detailed certainties in the Scriptures. Christ had said to His disciples, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, And shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again" (Matthew 20:18-19). How accurate the Word of God is.

"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews?" There seems to be a repeated moving in and out of the palace throughout this entire episode. Seemingly Pilate was sincere in trying to get to the root of the matter of the Jews' condemnation of Christ. From time to time there had been others who declared that they were the Messiah. The Roman government had always dealt harshly with anyone making such a claim. "Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?" Unquestionably, this was an appeal to Pilate's conscience. But swiftly the Roman governor silenced any attempt of his conscience to speak by his proud, thoughtless answer. "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done?"

Side-stepping all responsibility, Pilate made it clear that the

charges were fostered by the Jews, not the Romans. Thus he gave Jesus another chance to speak, asking, "What hast Thou done?" Christ stated not only the certainty and reality of His kingdom, but He described it: "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." By this statement our Lord affirmed the fact that He was a King.

In the strict sense, Christ's kingdom was different from that of the Romans or any other nation, for His kingdom was "not of this world." It had its origin in Heaven and not on earth. It was not protected by armed might, but by divine power. It was not supported by taxes, but by the unsearchable riches of Christ. What our Lord said must have sounded confusing to a proud man like Pilate, who boasted of the fact that he was a ruler in the great empire of Rome. But the Roman Empire has long since disappeared. The Kingdom of God continues with Christ still reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Pilate now puts the question differently, "Art Thou a king then?" The thought seems to be, if you are not a king of this world, are you a king of some kind? Jesus replied, "Thou sayest that I am a King." "Thou sayest" is the affirmation. Thus we might read His words, "Yes, I am a King. I rule over the hearts and minds of those who are members of My kingdom—I am a King."

Our Lord told Pilate His purpose for coming into the world was to "bear witness unto the truth." Christ did not come to establish glory for Himself, as was the case of most earthly leaders, including Pilate. True believers would listen to Christ and follow Him: "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."

Pilate cynically asked, "What is truth?" Doubtless he had read many of the Greek and Roman philosophers. But the more he read, the more confused he became. What do the unsaved know about truth? Christ is truth and He came to reveal Himself, that men might know the truth.

Pilate did not wait for Jesus to answer his question, but

turned immediately and went out into the courtyard again to give the Jews his verdict regarding Christ: "I find in Him no fault at all." Pilate was trying to play both sides. He did not want to offend those who were in authority over him, yet he wanted to keep in the good graces of the Jewish people. He had a sudden thought: "But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

For many years this custom had existed as a gesture of friendship with the Jews. At the passover time the Romans released a Jewish prisoner at the request of the people. Thus Pilate was willing to go the limit by declaring Jesus guilty, even though he found no guilt in Him. But at the same time, he was providing a way of escape so that everyone would be satisfied.

The Jews were not satisfied. "Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas." John tells us that "Barabbas was a robber." Luke tells us also that he was a murderer, "(Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison)" (Luke 23:19).

All this was meaningful. Christ was to become Barabbas' substitute. Barabbas was guilty and worthy of death. Christ was the perfect Son of God, rejected and hated of men. Barabbas was released while Christ bore the penalty, fulfilling the prophecies of His substitutionary death. Like Barabbas, you and I deserved to die. We were the guilty ones. But Christ the eternal Son of God laid down His life for us. He paid the price. He died in our place that we might be set free.

# 19

## THE CONDEMNED SAVIOUR

*John 19:1-16*

This is one of the most heartrending yet shameful portions of the New Testament. Step by step we are led by the Apostle John through the disgraceful atrocities inflicted upon our Lord, culminating in His crucifixion on the cross. Hardly can any true believer read this passage without deep emotion.

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him." Probably no other verse better depicts Pilate's despicable character. Seemingly convinced that Christ was innocent, yet, to appease his subjects, he submitted Christ to this severe maltreatment at the merciless hands of the soldiers.

Something of the violence of the Roman method of scourging can be understood from a statement in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*: "The culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods." But as appalling as this treatment of the Son of God was, we must recognize another fulfillment of prophecy. On one occasion Christ told His disciples: "For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And *they shall scourge Him*, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again" (Luke 18:32-33). In spite of the sorrow and suffering, everything was moving according to schedule.

"And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote Him with their hands." The crown of thorns was made from a thorny plant with quite flexible branches, which could be woven into the form of a crown. With sharp thorns pointing in every direction, this crown was

pressed on the head of our Lord, piercing the sacred flesh and causing the blood to cover His face and neck. Of course, His hands were bound so He could give Himself no release.

Someone found a cast-off purple garment which they threw over Christ's bleeding back and shoulders as they laughed uproariously and shouted, "Hail, King of the Jews!" The robe was suggestive of the imperial purple worn by kings.

"And they smote Him with their hands." This passage could also be translated, "They smote Him with rods." Doubtless they struck Him on the crown of thorns, driving the thorns deeper into His flesh.

After witnessing the beastly actions of the soldiers, Pilate went out of the palace again to the waiting Jews. "Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him." This was the second time he made this statement. In verse six he repeats it again. If Pilate found no fault in Him, did he think the crowd would be satisfied when they saw the bleeding, suffering Christ dressed as a king with a crown of thorns?

"Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests, therefore, and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him." Pilate possessed authority to free Jesus, but he had neither the courage nor the conviction to stand for his beliefs.

Some have felt that the statement, "Behold, the man," was spoken to evoke the sympathies of his audience. It has been thought that Pilate meant, "Look at the poor man. Consider how He has been beaten. Here is a poor, ignorant fanatic who deserves no more by way of judgment." But the angry Jews would not listen to such talk. They had only one answer—"Crucify Him." Here were wicked men who would not think of stepping over the threshold of a Gentile king for fear that they might be defiled, yet thought nothing of attempting to murder the Son of God.

Pilate in bitter disgust shouted back, "Take ye Him, and crucify Him; for I find no fault in Him." The Jews knew that

what Pilate said was meaningless, for it would be impossible for them to crucify Christ. Not only would they have broken their spiritual law, but Roman law as well.

So the Jews attempted a new avenue of approach. "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Probably the law they were referring to was that recorded in Leviticus 24:16: "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death."

The Jewish statement had a profound effect. "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid." The Roman governor must have known of Christ's past and mighty miracles; did Pilate suddenly think, suppose Christ is a God come down to this earth? Suppose Jesus was right and the Jews were wrong?

Then, too, Pilate's wife sent him a message: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19). Possibly all these thoughts ran through Pilate's mind. No wonder he was "the *more* afraid." He never wanted this case. From the beginning he had tried to escape it. Now he is more afraid than ever as he hears the phrase, "the Son of God."

Pilate "went again into the judgment hall." The new charge of blasphemy made by the Jews called for another personal interview with Christ. His first question was, "Whence art Thou?" Did Christ really come from Heaven? Was He actually the Son of God? Was the accusation made by the Jews true or false? "But Jesus gave him no answer."

Was this a mistake on Christ's part? Certainly not, for He came not to live but to die and to give "Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). Many years before, Isaiah had prophesied of the Messiah, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). At the crucial moment,

when Christ could have talked the Roman governor into providing a release, He remained silent. What proof that Jesus is the Son of God! The Jews declared Him to be a blasphemer, but God the Father said of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Pilate became indignant at Christ's refusal to answer, and in arrogant dignity asked, "Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?" Pilate had been known to make prisoners cringe before him in their pleas for mercy, but here was a prisoner such as he had never known before.

"Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." We are told in Romans 13:1, "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Pilate was in his place of authority by the grace of God, not by his own ability. Even though Pilate was guilty for condemning Him, he was not as guilty as the Jews, who condemned Christ because of their unbelief. They knew the Scriptures. They should have recognized their Messiah. Pilate was a Gentile; his condemnation was because of willful ignorance.

It is obvious that once again conviction came upon Pilate. Indeed, he had every opportunity to become a follower of Christ. But he resisted the Holy Spirit. "From thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." From this verse it appears that Pilate left Christ in the judgment hall and went out again to the Jews in the courtyard to urge them to let Jesus go. But the mob was adamant. They were determined to do away with Christ.

Probably it was the high priest who spoke up, saying, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." It was this argument that convinced Pilate that Christ must die, for it was a case of either Pilate losing his job or Christ being crucified.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus

forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha." Hearing the name of Caesar and realizing that he might be in for trouble, Pilate acted immediately on the wishes of the people. He brought Jesus out into the courtyard, and went to the Pavement, a raised platform of marble on which the governor sat to issue judgment.

"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour." That is, it was the day before the Sabbath of the passover week, which was used by the Jews as a day of preparation for the great feast. John does not give the exact time of the day, "about the sixth hour." Mark states that "it was the third hour" (Mark 15:25). Putting the two together, it would follow that some time after 9:00 o'clock in the morning and before noon, the judgment was passed.

Pilate then delivered "Him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led Him away." Who can think on these words without sensing the warning that comes to the soul of every man? At the same time, perceive the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:4 as we never have before: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Christ is the Son of God, as He said. His vile persecutors put Him on the cross where He died. He was buried, but He did not remain in the tomb. He lives at this moment and is desirous that everyone come to Him and claim forgiveness of sins through His redeeming blood.

## THE CROSS OF GLORY

*John 19:17-30*

"And He, bearing His cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha:

Where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." It was the custom among the Romans to force the vilest criminals to carry their own crosses.

You may wonder why John stated that Christ bore His cross while Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that Simon the Cyrenian was the cross-bearer. This is not a contradiction; both accounts should be combined. Doubtless from His weakened condition, as the result of the scourging and the nervous exhaustion, our Lord collapsed along the way under the weight and burden of the cross. As the result, the soldiers compelled Simon to complete the task.

The exact location of Golgotha is not certain, although it was outside the city wall, as the words "went forth" suggest. Here was the fulfillment of a great Old Testament type, the sin offering, which on the day of atonement was carried "without the camp" (Leviticus 16:27). Christ became God's offering for sin, to suffer and die outside the city of Jerusalem. Hebrews 13:12 further substantiates this: "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." The writer of Hebrews challenges the people of God: "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13). Here is a definite call to commitment to Christ and separation from the world. Even as our Lord was well pleasing to the Father, so we who know Him must follow Him.

That Christ was crucified between the two criminals suggests further the pent-up hatred of the people. Only the worst criminals were placed in the center. What humiliation and shame our Lord suffered.

"And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city, and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin." Let us not think for a minute that Pilate was relenting in his attitude toward Christ; what he wrote and placed on the cross was in retaliation for what the Jews had done to him. They had forced him to crucify

Christ against his will. Thus to title Jesus the King of the Jews was a profound insult to them. The Jewish leaders were greatly incensed by Pilate's spite. They said, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews." But the haughty ruler was not to be moved: "What I have written I have written."

"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also His coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did." Crucifixion was a matter of course for these soldiers who were insensible to the feelings and sufferings of others.

The first act in this brutal method of murder was to strip the accused. Next they laid Him on His back on the cross, stretched out His arms on the crossbar, and hammered nails through His hands. Likewise, they drove a spike through His feet. The cross was placed in the ground, the sufferer left to hang and die. Usually it would be several days before he expired. Consider the sensitivity of the nerves in the hands and feet. Think of the helplessness, hanging, waiting to die, all through the heat of the day and the cold of the night. One would think the soldiers could never get over such a sight, but it was nothing to them.

The soldiers' greatest concern was to claim Christ's garments, which was the right of the executioner. The four soldiers divided His clothing among themselves until they came to the seamless "coat," for which they cast lots. Here again we see another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy. Ages before, David, inspired by the Holy Spirit in his great Messianic Psalm 22, wrote, "They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture" (Psalm 22:18). The action of the soldiers must be added to the innumerable divine verities assuring us that the Bible is the Word of God.

In contrast to the four soldiers, four women were standing

by. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." How meaningful a mother's love is! Disregarding the danger that surrounded her, Mary stood near during the sorrowful ordeal. With her were holy women who were fearless and courageous in the hour of deepest need. While all but one of the disciples had forsaken Christ, the four dear women remained true.

"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." How sympathetic and understanding our Lord was. Even near death, He was concerned about others.

Undoubtedly the disciple who was standing by was the writer of this Gospel. Doubtless Joseph was dead, so the Lord Jesus committed His mother to John, to care for as though she were his mother.

"And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Who could begin to enumerate the blessings that fell upon that household as the result of the willing obedience of God's servant to care for the mother of Christ.

"After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." This statement by our Lord is not given by the other three Gospel writers. They state, however, some things that John has not recorded. Putting them together we get the complete story.

It is believed that a miraculous darkness covered the earth. Matthew wrote, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour" (Matthew 27:45). It was during this time that the heartrending cry was heard from the lips of our Lord, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Toward the end of the ninth hour the Lord Jesus said, "I thirst." John relates the response of the soldiers: "Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with

vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth." Our Lord had refused the first offer of vinegar and gall which is often given to dying criminals to lessen the pain.

"When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished; and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." Redemption was completed. Christ had offered up Himself as the eternal sacrifice for sin. The law was ended. No longer was man bound by the law unto righteousness. The old covenant was finished and the new would begin. Having completed that which He came to do, "He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." Literally, He "dismissed His spirit" of His own volition. Neither the Jews nor the Romans took His life from Him. He gave it up of His own free will, that He might finish the work for which He was sent—to provide eternal redemption for all who would believe on His Name.

Christ's Spirit went to Paradise, where He met the Spirit of the thief, as He had promised earlier in the day. It is believed also that, during this time prior to His resurrection, "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). The inhabitants of hell as well as earth would know that the Word of God standeth sure and true. The prophet declared in Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Christ's death on the cross was one of the greatest prophecies ever to be fulfilled. Throughout the Old Testament type, symbol, and direct statement foretold Christ's death. When He cried out, "It is finished," all doubt was banished, for God's Word must stand forever as truth.

## OUR CRUCIFIED LORD

*John 19:31-37*

Having given us a vivid description of the crucifixion, the Holy Spirit directs our attention to the treatment given to Christ's dead body. First, we are told what His enemies did.

"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." The Romans were not disturbed by dead bodies hanging on crosses, for frequently they left their victims to rot. But the Jews, who appeared to be so punctilious in the observance of the law, felt that immediate action had to be taken because it was the day of "preparation." This was Friday, the day before their Sabbath, which was "an high day," or more literally, "a great day," being the first day of the passover. Friday was spent in preparation for this important Jewish day, and it was imperative that the bodies be removed before the Sabbath. Often-times one being crucified might remain alive two or three days as life slowly ebbed from him on the cross. But if the authorities wanted to hasten death, the barbaric method of breaking legs was most successful. Permission being granted to break the legs of those who were crucified, the soldiers went to work.

There is a theory that Jesus did not really die on the cross, that He merely fainted or swooned, that later, when placed in the cool, damp tomb, He was revived, and thus, the explanation for His resurrection. But when the soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus, they did not break them, for they knew He was dead. These soldiers were not novices; this was their job. When they came to Christ's cross, they saw a dead man. But just to make sure, "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side."

The Apostle John, who was an eyewitness to this cruel action, states an important fact: "forthwith came there out blood and water." This is the fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Zechariah 13:1, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." When the blood of Christ was shed on the cross, this fountain was opened so that not only the Jews but the Gentiles as well might have cleansing from sin.

There seems no doubt that, when the soldier pierced the side of our Lord, the spear was plunged into His heart. John never forgot this sight, for many years later he wrote, "This is He that

came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5:6). The outflow of blood and water was another evidence of the fact that, when Christ's side was pierced by the soldier's spear, He was dead already. Had there been blood only, we might conclude that it was the spear that brought death to Christ. But the blood and water provide another evidence of the truth of the Scriptures. Christ had already dismissed His Spirit.

Some have suggested that the Lord Jesus died of a broken heart, evidenced by the blood and water. It would be more accurate to say that He died *with* a broken heart. Jesus declared of His life, "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). But this divine act was not apart from the grief and sorrow of all the world's sin weighing heavily upon Him. "Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness" (Psalm 69:20). How clearly these words portray the feelings of our Lord during the last hours of His life.

"And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John was there. John was not a dreamer. All he has recorded are facts concerning the divine plan of redemption, recorded for the sole purpose, "that ye might believe." Believe what? That the Lord Jesus died on the cross, that He offered Himself up to God as the eternal price for sin. "Believe this," John pleaded, for this is the most important truth of history.

"For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they pierced." These two events, the restraint from breaking Christ's legs and the piercing of His side with a spear, were not for the purpose that the Scripture might be fulfilled, but rather, as the result of these things the Scriptures were fulfilled. Christ was the fulfillment of the passover lamb. As no one was to break a bone in the body of the passover lamb (Exodus 12:46), so Christ's bones were not to be broken. Many years before Christ was born, Zechariah prophesied that the body of Jesus would be

pierced, and centuries later at His second coming the Jews would recognize Him as their Messiah and mourn over the fact that they pierced His body (Zechariah 12:10).

How accurate the Word of God is! God has not spoken in generalities; He has made it indubitably clear that salvation is through His Son. There is no other way.

### LOVE'S TENDER CARE

*John 19:38-42*

After His death Christ was touched only by those who gave honor to His Name. "And after this Joseph, of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him leave. He came, therefore, and took the body of Jesus." Here we are introduced to a new name. Nothing is recorded in the New Testament about Joseph of Arimathea prior to Christ's death on the cross. Obviously he stood close by and watched all the proceedings.

It would seem that he had been a believer for some time. Doubtless John 12:42-43 had reference to him as well as others like him, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." It might well be that Joseph of Arimathea was fearful of his position as a member of the Sanhedrin. But after witnessing the sufferings and death of our Saviour, Joseph of Arimathea changed his course. Christ's disciples had forsaken Him and fled, but Joseph went to Pilate and evidenced his own personal discipleship with Christ as he "besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus." Does it seem remarkable to you that Pilate granted this privilege? Pilate did not want to crucify Jesus in the first

place. What more could he do than to grant permission to proceed with his gesture of kindness?

Perhaps Joseph called on some of the bystanders to help him in removing the cross from the hole in the ground, gently laying it down, and then carefully removing the nails from the hands and feet of our Lord. Had it not been for Joseph of Arimathea, we might wonder what would have happened to the body of our Lord. But of course God the Father had arranged perfectly for the burial of His Son. Long before this, Joseph was God's chosen instrument to fulfill this responsibility. Isaiah in his marvelous prophecy declared (53:9), "And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth."

An old friend appeared at this point, one who had been known before but about whom little is said in the Bible. "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." Nicodemus had been a secret believer like Joseph of Arimathea. He had sought out Jesus at night, probably because he too feared his position as a member of the Sanhedrin. But one cannot overlook Nicodemus' steady, though slow, growth in grace. First he appeared to Christ in the darkness of night as a humble inquirer. Later he took a stand for Christ in the midst of the Jewish council, speaking in favor of our Lord. Now he boldly steps out to aid Joseph in the preparation of Christ's body for burial.

Let Nicodemus be a reminder to us. What we do for God should not be relegated to the future. We read in 1 Samuel 21:8, "the king's business required haste." It still does.

Nicodemus "brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." Not only was this gift extremely costly but very heavy. The Roman pound was twelve ounces. Thus the burden borne by Nicodemus was approximately seventy-five pounds. How far he carried this, we are not told.

"Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury."

Note another of the many details of Scripture. Christ was not embalmed and the body mutilated, as was done among the Egyptians, nor was He put into a coffin. He was wrapped and bound in linen clothes on which the mixture of myrrh and aloes had been poured, so as to be pressed against His skin. Here is another evidence of the fact that Christ actually died. Certainly Joseph and Nicodemus would have sensed any life in the body of our Lord during this laborious process of wrapping His body scores of times before completing their work.

"Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid." Can you not visualize the two grief-stricken men as they walked slowly toward the beautiful garden where they carefully placed our Saviour in the tomb which had only recently been hewn in the rock?

He who created the world and possessed everything was buried in a borrowed tomb. When He was born into the world He was placed in a borrowed manger. We are living in an age when much emphasis is placed upon the accumulation of wealth and property. For many, success is associated with things. Was Christ successful in His life? The ungodly would claim that He was a failure. But those of us who know Him are aware that He was perfectly successful because of His faithfulness and obedience to the Father.

"There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." Here we detect more of the love and devotion Nicodemus and Joseph had for Christ. They must have labored hard and fast in order to place Jesus in the tomb before six o'clock, for it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that our Lord released His spirit. Thus there were less than three hours for Joseph to get permission from Pilate, to take the body from the cross, and for Nicodemus to join him in caring for the burial.

Thus ended the greatest funeral of all history. But this is not without its message for every true believer. Should we fear the grave after our Lord has entered it? The grave is not the end. There is more to come. What hope believers have in Christ!

# 20

## THE EMPTY TOMB

*John 20:1-10*

Without chapter 20, the previous chapter would be meaningless. Anyone could die on a cross, but only the Son of God could rise from the dead.

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre." This is the Mary out of whom our Lord had cast seven devils. Naturally, after such a miraculous deliverance she was greatly concerned about her crucified Lord. Someone has said that "she was last at His cross and first at His grave."

From John's account we might gather that Mary went to the tomb alone, but as we compare the other Gospels we learn that several other women were in her company. Their special mission was to care for the body of our Lord. Upon seeing the stone rolled away, Mary turned, and forsaking the other women, hastened to tell Peter and John of her discovery. "She runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him."

Why should Mary want to tell Peter? Had he not denied Christ? Was he worthy of being told? Several things seem to be clear. John had been charged by our Lord to care for His mother. He had taken her to his home. Doubtless Peter, who was brokenhearted and confused, sought refuge in the home of John as well. Who could have provided more help for Peter at such a time than the young, stalwart disciple John? Thus it

seems that Mary ran to John's house to announce Christ's disappearance.

There is disappointment expressed in Mary's exclamation. It suggests doubt that Christ had actually risen from the dead. She thought the Lord Jesus had been stolen from the tomb. Having been summoned by Mary, "Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre." Peter's concern was more than mere curiosity. Ever since his denial of Christ, he had been grieving under the load of his guilt. His response to Mary's announcement must have been prompted by the hope of another chance to fulfill his earlier promise, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee" (Matthew 26:35).

"So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre." It would be natural for John to outrun Peter, for he was younger and sturdier. Upon arriving at the tomb, John merely stooped down and looked in. Imagine the thoughts that must have flashed through John's mind as he saw the empty tomb and the grave clothes. Why he did not enter the tomb we do not know. Probably what he saw was enough to convince him that what Mary had said was unquestionably true.

Peter reacted differently. "Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." Peter is not to be condemned for his tempestuous nature, nor is John to be criticized because he was so reserved. God made all of us what we are, and we should not try to be like someone else. The secret of usefulness is not the possession of a particular nature, but rather it is to be God-controlled. Whatever one's temperament may be, it can be used by the Lord, but only following complete submission to Christ.

Peter realized that Mary had been mistaken; Christ had not been stolen out of the tomb. The evidence was in the wrappings that had been around our Lord's body which, rather than lying flat, remained the same as they had been about His body. It

would have been impossible for anyone to unwrap Christ and then to refashion the wrappings as they were before Christ emerged from them. It was indeed a miracle.

"Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed." The word "believed" does not mean conversion here. John had believed on Christ long before. John believed that Christ had been raised from the dead, as He had prophesied. Visualizing the wrappings, he was convinced that Jesus had not been stolen from the tomb. The next verse makes this clear. "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

Our Lord's enemies were quicker to understand Christ's statements regarding His resurrection than His own disciples. Immediately after His death, His wicked murderers went to Pilate with the plea, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matthew 27:63-64). The request was granted. "Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can" (Matthew 27:65). These men expected Christ to rise from the dead, while the disciples were still confused as to what Jesus meant.

After this remarkable experience, "the disciples went away again unto their own home." They left the empty tomb different than when they came. They went away believing and convinced that all that Christ had said was true.

## THE SORROWING MADE GLAD

*John 20:11-18*

Mary returned to the tomb and continued to stand by, even after Peter and John left. She "stood without at the sepulchre

weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre." The word "weeping" is really the word for *sobbing*. Her sobbing was the expression of deep sorrow, not only because the body of Christ was missing from the tomb but as the result of the entire crucifixion experience. Surely we can understand the grief of Mary's heart.

When Mary looked into the tomb, she saw "two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." Angels, as God's ministering spirits, appear and disappear according to the will of God. Doubtless they had not been in the tomb when Peter entered.

The angels asked, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Her answer was virtually the same as the announcement she had made to Peter and John. There is one slight difference. When talking to the disciples she spoke of Jesus as "*the Lord*." But in her reply to the angels she said "*my Lord*." Mary's love for Christ is to be admired, even though she was limited in spiritual perception. In her own thinking, Christ was dead, but He was still her Lord.

Then, "She turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus." The angels made no reply to Mary's words, probably because they realized that their Master was in their midst. Either Mary heard someone behind her or sensed that someone was near. Quickly she turned around to see who it was.

Several reasons have been given as to why Mary did not recognize the Lord Jesus. Was she so grief-stricken that her eyes were filled with tears? Was it still so early in the morning that she did not recognize Him? For some divine reason God prevented her from beholding Christ, as was the case with the Emmaus disciples. They did not perceive that the Son of God was in their presence until He opened their eyes.

Immediately Christ asked, "Woman, why weepest thou?" This question, asked by the angels as well as by the Lord, suggests the uselessness of many of our tears. The words also embody a gentle rebuke. It was as though our Lord was saying, "Why do you weep, Mary? Do you not recall that I said I would

rise from the dead? You should rejoice and not be sad." The second question our Lord asked, "Whom seekest thou?" suggests that Christ was saying, "Mary, whom did you think would be in this tomb? Surely you did not expect to find Me here?"

Mary had no recognition of the one to whom she was speaking. "She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if Thou have borne Him hence, tell me where Thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Did Mary think she was strong enough to carry the body of Jesus back to the tomb if He were to be found? Though her understanding of truth was limited, there were no limits to her faith.

Mary gave little attention until the Lord spoke her name. Quickly, "She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." Upon hearing her Lord speak her name, she recognized Him immediately.

Our Lord's reply seems shrouded with mystery. "Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father." One may read various interpretations of these words, but all of them are merely conjectures. Surely by "Touch Me not" Christ did not mean that Mary should not touch Christ's resurrection body, for only minutes later Mary's companions "held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him" (Matthew 28:9). The word "touch" as used here means to "cling to." Doubtless upon recognizing the Lord Jesus, Mary fell to His feet, embracing them as never to let go. It seems as though our Lord said, "Mary, you must not hold on to Me now. My task is not completely fulfilled. I must ascend unto My Father, that the work of redemption might be completed for all who believe."

Christ gave Mary specific instructions: "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." Christ wanted His followers to know that He did not rise from the dead to remain on this earth but to enter Heaven as their High Priest and Advocate. One cannot help but understand Christ's great love in this message. He calls the disciples "My brethren." He says, "I ascend unto My Father, and *your* Father; and to My God, and *your* God." Only three days before, the disciples had forsaken Him and

fled. Their attitude toward Him did not coincide with their profession. But how wonderful was Christ's unchanging love for them.

Mary responded to Christ's directions immediately. She "came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her." How their hearts must have rejoiced to know that Christ was not dead but living. This was good news for them. But it was also good news for lost men and women in every age to come.

## PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

*John 20:19-23*

For some reason, John does not record the next three appearances of the resurrected Christ but continues with the fifth: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."

It is not difficult to realize why the disciples had gathered. New hope had sprung up within their hearts. Thus they assembled to discuss all that they had seen and heard on Christ's resurrection day, as well as recommit themselves to their Lord. They met in secret for fear that what had happened to the Lord Jesus on the cross might be their lot as well. All were present except Thomas, who refused to believe the testimony of those who had seen Christ.

Suddenly the Lord appeared, saying, "Peace be unto you." Our Lord's words were more than a polite greeting commonly used by the Jews. Before His departure through death, He bequeathed His peace to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"

(John 14:27). Though they listened to Him attentively, they did not appropriate this peace. As the result, following His crucifixion they were discouraged and disappointed. Now He reminds them that His peace is available still.

It seems that there was some doubt among the disciples as to whether this was actually the Saviour. "And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." We might well imagine the condition of the wounds under normal circumstances, having been afflicted on Friday and now it was only Sunday night. It is highly probable, however, that through Christ's miraculous power the wounds became scars. But there is no question about it, they were visible in the risen body of our Lord.

Nothing is said to suggest that the disciples touched Christ to determine His reality. They must have been convinced, for "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." Christ's words of comfort, "Peace be unto you" were further reassurance that He had forgiven them for their faithlessness. He then commissioned them for the weeks and months ahead, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Our Saviour had come "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Soon He was to leave this earth, but His ministry was not to end. It would continue through His blood-bought children.

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Here was a remarkable provision to enable the disciples to fulfill their obligation. This was not their first experience with the Holy Spirit. Long before, Christ had made it clear that when one believed on Him, the Spirit would make His abode with the believer. In John 7:39 He spoke of the Holy Spirit, "which they that believe on Him should receive." The experience in the upper room did not have to do with the indwelling but rather the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

To witness for Christ, not only is it essential that one be indwelt by the Spirit, he must be filled. Verse 22 makes this clear.

This is the only time our Lord ever "breathed" on the disciples. In Genesis 2:7 we read, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Until then man was but a lump of clay. A Christian without the infilling of the Holy Spirit is as helpless and useless in serving God as man was before God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Notice also that Christ did not force the fullness of His spirit on His disciples. He said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." In breathing on them, He made the fullness possible. But they had to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit by faith in the same manner in which they had received the indwelling of the Spirit at conversion.

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Do not be disillusioned into thinking that these men were given special authority to absolve sin. Nowhere in the New Testament was anyone ever delegated to forgive sin. The disciples knew that only Christ could forgive sin. What did Jesus mean by His statement? Simply that wherever a Christian shares the truth, those who believe in Christ will have their sins forgiven by God, but those who refuse to receive Christ will continue in their lost state, with their sins being retained. God the Holy Spirit does this through the believer. Thus we should grasp every opportunity to let the Spirit work through us as we faithfully witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

### A DOUBTER CONVINCED

*John 20:24-31*

The ten disciples who gathered in the upper room experienced a profound blessing that none of them anticipated. What an experience that must have been! I suppose every one of them

said afterwards, "I would not have missed it for anything." But regrettably, somebody did miss it. "Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."

Little is said in the Bible about Thomas, but whatever is said suggests that he was of a melancholy, gloomy temperament. When our Lord wanted to go back into Judea with its many dangers, Thomas blurted out, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). In His concluding message to His disciples, Jesus spoke of going away, and then added, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (John 14:4). How did Thomas react? "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5) Whatever Thomas said seemed to evidence his down-in-the-mouth attitude. Surely he had been told of our Lord's appearances, but he refused to believe. "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Thomas refused to believe until he could "see." By God's grace, he had that privilege a week later. "And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." Doubtless the disciples were gathered in the same place they had been before. Thomas was not absent this time. If there was such a happening again, he wanted to be in on it.

Immediately after His greeting, our Lord extended a special invitation to Thomas: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side." He followed this by a gentle rebuke, "Be not faithless, but believing." Here was a call for decision in Thomas' life. We are not told that Thomas examined Christ's wounds, but he cried out immediately, in wholehearted commitment, "My Lord and my God."

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Here is an important beatitude that was not in-

cluded in the Sermon on the Mount. Of whom was He speaking? Certainly not of the other ten disciples, for they had seen and had believed. He was speaking of that great host in ages to come who would by faith make their commitment to Jesus Christ and claim Him as Saviour and Lord.

Next, John provides another of his parenthetical statements that appear so frequently throughout his Gospel. What he says here is related not only to this particular chapter, but to the entire book. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

Christ's miracles were performed "in the presence of His disciples." This does not mean that there were no unbelievers present, but that Christ's miracles had been substantiated by accurate witnesses.

John did not record all the miracles Jesus performed, nor did the other writers. The ones John selected were chosen for the specific purpose "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." Christ had said to Thomas, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." No one can see Christ with the physical eye in our day, but he can see Him with the spiritual eye in His Word, the Bible. God has given tangible evidence of the mighty miracles Christ performed in the written Word that the unsaved might read and believe.

# 21

## FRUITLESS TOIL

*John 21:1-14*

Some feel that the last chapter of John is an appendix, that the Gospel really concluded with chapter 20 and that some time later, John added a postscript. This does not seem plausible, however, for what is recorded fits so well into the Gospel, providing a fitting conclusion to the previous chapter.

"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed He Himself." "After these things" does not necessarily mean immediately after, but some time within the forty-day period before our Lord ascended, following the events of chapter 20.

The sea of Tiberias bore significant interest in the life of our Lord. It was on this stormy sea that He walked when He came to His troubled disciples. It was out of this sea that Peter took the fish with tax money that he paid according to Christ's command. It was beside the sea of Tiberias that our Lord fed the hungry multitude with bread and fishes. Furthermore, it was near Tiberias that Christ healed the helpless demoniac, permitting the legion of devils to enter into the swine that perished in the sea. On one occasion Christ taught from a small boat as the people stood along the shore and listened. Much of our Lord's ministry was carried on in towns that bordered on the sea of Tiberias.

"There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples." Here were seven witnesses, providentially convened, who would soon be eyewitnesses to another appearance of our Lord. The names of two of the seven are not given. It is thought they might have

been Andrew and Philip. Where the other four disciples were at this time is unknown.

The quietness of this little gathering was broken by Peter, who declared, "I go a fishing." The others responded, "We also go with thee." Most of these men had been fishermen when Christ found them. But He saved them out of this life to be His disciples. He gave them a new calling: "I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Their present action suggests retrogression. They were reverting to the old way of life. They had lost sight of God's plan for their lives.

"They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing." That after an entire night of fishing they were without a catch suggests that they were laboring in the flesh. Of course, there have been many fishermen since who have come home without any fish, but these men had been appointed to carry on the work of the Lord, not to be fishermen.

"But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore." No matter what the difficulty or problem may be in the believer's life, the morning always comes. Many years ago David wrote in Psalm 30:5, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Sometimes the night seems awfully long. We wonder if morning will ever come. But be assured, it always does.

When the morning came, Jesus was there. He is always in "the morning" for His beloved ones. In fact, there can be no light without the true Light: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He is the One who banishes darkness. He is the One who gives peace and consolation. The morning came and "Jesus stood on the shore."

"But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." They saw a form, but probably because of the mist of early morning they could not distinguish who it was. Sometimes we are guilty of not recognizing Jesus in the morning light. Our prayers are answered and we forget who it was that provided. So often we glorify man rather than give due praise to God.

"Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat?" This question could be read, "Men, have you caught anything that we can eat?" Downcast and discouraged, they replied, "No." It had been a long wasted night. How useless are labors done in the flesh, devoid of the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. Out of the will of God, it is impossible to know the blessing of God.

Obedience results in fruitfulness. "And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." Who could begin to estimate what would happen if all believers were to work in obedience to the commands of our Lord?

Consider the profound effect this miracle had upon the disciples. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes." Peter was brought face to face with his own sinfulness. Quickly, reaching for his fisherman's coat, he wrapped it around him, and jumping into the sea, he struck out for the shore, endeavoring to reach his Lord. The other disciples, who were a little more reserved, proceeded in the boat, dragging their net full of fish.

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." This is a perfect example of God's providence and care. The disciples were not worthy of this provision. But once again our Lord revealed His marvelous grace in caring for the physical needs of His own. Perhaps the spot where He built the fire to prepare the fish was the place where He performed the miracle of the feeding of the multitude. Whether it is five thousand men or only seven, our Lord is concerned about their needs.

To impress upon the disciples the importance of following Him and doing His will, Jesus said, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." Peter responded immediately. "Simon Peter

went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." Here were two miracles: first, the amazing catch of fish, and secondly, the net did not break. Could there be any doubt on the part of the disciples that they were in the presence of the resurrected Christ?

Out Lord extended a gracious invitation to the disciples, "Come, and dine," literally, "Break your fast." "And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord." Here again we are brought face to face with our Lord's profound humility. "Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise." There is nothing said here about Christ eating the bread, but He gave it to them. Think of it — the Son of God, the glorified Saviour, becoming a waiter to cater to His erring saints. But is this not the nature of Christ?

"This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead." The "third time" does not mean that this was His third appearance, for there had been at least six different appearances before this one. The first five were on the first day of His resurrection. The sixth was a week later when He appeared to rebuke Thomas' unbelief. Thus John must mean that this is the third day on which Christ made appearances to His disciples.

## UNRESERVED SURRENDER

*John 21:15-17*

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" It seems surprising that our Lord should speak to Peter as "Simon, son of Jonas," for our Lord had not referred to the apostle in this manner since his conversion. After Andrew was saved, he brought his brother Simon to Christ and the Lord Jesus said, "Thou art Simon the

son of Jonas: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). In the intervening months and years, our Lord had never again referred to Peter as "Simon, son of Jonas." Now it would seem that Christ was giving him an opportunity to start all over again. Perhaps in using the phrase, "Son of Jonas," He made the apostle aware of a new beginning.

"Lovest thou Me more than these?" When Jesus spoke of "these," He must have pointed in some direction. Did He refer to the other six disciples, or to the nets and the fish? Doubtless the whole conversation was to remind Peter of his complete failure at the time of his denial of the Lord Jesus prior to the crucifixion. Peter had boldly declared, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matthew 26:33). This was as to say, "Though the love of these other disciples may wane and grow cold, You can be sure my love will remain the same."

It is possible that our Lord meant, "Peter, is your love still greater than that of the other disciples?" Christ was not being harsh, He was endeavoring to draw Peter to realize his own personal need of a more perfect love for Christ. The apostle's threefold denial of our Saviour was an evidence of his vain boasting.

It is possible, too, that our Lord had in mind the fish and the net. Peter had said with disgust, "I go a fishing." This suggests that he never quite claimed the victory over his former life. He had been called from fishing to follow Christ. But he had never been completely overwhelmed by the love of Christ. Peter was not fully yielded.

During his conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter came to the place of unreserved surrender. The fishing business with its lucrative gain was put at the feet of our Lord. How do we know this? We need only read Acts 3 where we see him on his way to the Temple with John for prayer. Lying beside the temple gate called Beautiful, a helpless beggar was asking alms. Hear Peter's reply: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). There had been a time in Peter's

life when silver and gold meant everything to him. But a great change had taken place, so that he could say to the beggar, "It is not silver and gold that you need. I have learned from experience that there is something more important than this. You need Christ. It is He who can do all things for you. Thus it is in His Name that I command you to rise up and walk."

Futhermore, we read in Acts 8 of Simon, who, when he witnessed the receiving of the power of the Holy Ghost through the laying on of the hands of the disciples, "Offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:18-19). What was Peter's reply? "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). Peter knew the victory Simon needed in his heart, for the apostle had been through the same battle. Thus it seems to me that Christ referred not only to the other disciples, but also to the nets and the fishes, as He said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?"

Peter replied, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." This was more than a mere reply. It was a confession. For the word Peter used for "love" was different from that which our Lord used. When Christ spoke of "love," it was the highest kind of love that knew no compromise. The word Peter used was the word "affection." It was not the supreme love that Peter as well as all of us should express toward Christ. It was as though Peter said to his Lord, "You know me. You understand how fickle I am."

As a further invitation to unqualified love, our Lord reminded Peter of his former call and what the apostle should have been doing, as He said, "Feed My lambs." The word "lambs" as used here refers to immature believers who need the teaching of God's Word to grow in grace. This was Peter's special responsibility. Long before, he was converted and called out of the world, that he might strengthen men and women in the faith. But it was impossible to do this until Christ had the place of supremacy.

For the second time our Lord asked Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" This time it was not "more than these." Seemingly Jesus said, "Yes, Simon, I do know you. How well I know and understand your divided heart. But Peter, are you ready now to go all the way? Are you willing to surrender all and no longer live for self but for others, to build them up in the things of God? Peter, you are My chosen instrument; to do My bidding, you must be wholly given over to Me."

What a battle must have been going on in Peter's heart. For even yet he did not seem to be ready. In spite of our Lord's tenderness, he proffered the same reply, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee," or more literally, "Yes, Lord; I do love Thee, but not as you desire. I have only an affection for Thee."

Christ said, "Feed My sheep." It is "sheep" now rather than "lambs." "Sheep" has to do with stronger believers, those who are full-grown in the Lord. But even though mature in the faith, they, too, need the shepherding care of a Spirit-guided leader. Christ besought Peter to be that leader.

In the King James version of the Bible, our Lord's third question to Peter appears to be the same as the others, but actually it is different. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" This time the word our Lord used for "love" was the same word Peter had been using. What our Lord asked here was, "Then is it true, Peter, that all you have is an affection for Me?" "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?"

It is understandable that Peter was grieved. Doubtless he was reminded of his threefold denial of Christ and his miserable failure in his Christian experience. There seems to be a definite relationship between the threefold denial and our Lord's threefold interrogation.

Christ's third question pricked Peter's heart. Deeply convicted by the Spirit of God, Peter cried out, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Literally he was saying, "Lord, You know me all too well, but from this time on I promise that I will love Thee with my whole heart."

Peter finally came to the place of full and complete yieldedness to Christ, as he should have at his conversion. But as is the case with many of us, we are slow to respond to the call of God. When Peter said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things," he was correct. Christ does know all things. He knew how weak and undependable Peter would be. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter was sifted as wheat by Satan. But even though Peter denied Christ outwardly, he never lost his faith in Christ. He was defeated but not destroyed. Thus it would seem that when he cried out, "I love Thee with my whole heart," the conversion Jesus spoke about took place; not a conversion from sin to salvation, but a conversion from self to full commitment.

After Peter made his great declaration, Jesus said to him the third time, "Feed My sheep." This is what Peter did ever after. No longer do we see him as a frail, stumbling disciple. He became a mighty firebrand for God. In fact, on the Day of Pentecost he stood to preach, and following his Spirit-filled message, three thousand came to Christ. Later when Peter, along with John, was in jeopardy of his life for the proclamation of the truth, after being commanded not to speak in the Name of Christ, his reply was, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

On another occasion, while with a little band of disciples making known the name of Christ, Peter was arrested and beaten. But later the apostle and his friends went out "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Did the persecution stop Peter and his friends from proclaiming the truth? We read that "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). Here was a new Peter, who said, and meant it, "Lord Jesus, I do love Thee with my entire heart. I love Thee more than anyone or anything else in the world."

## FOLLOW ME

*John 21:18-25*

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." As a young man, Peter gave little attention to the plan or purpose of God for his life. He was free and went about doing as he pleased, controlled by the flesh rather than the Spirit. Christ indicated that the future would be different. As Peter grew older, he would realize more and more the need of deciding everything in the light of God's perfect will. In fact, as an old man he would freely submit to the most violent kind of death, recognizing it as God's chosen path into eternity.

The phrase, "thou shalt stretch forth thy hands," was a prophecy that Peter would die by crucifixion. Church history confirms this. Tradition has it that when the apostle was brought to be crucified he chose to be crucified head downward, feeling unworthy to die as did his Lord.

"This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God." There is something here we must not overlook. It was not, "This spake He, signifying by what death he should *die*." It was, "by what death he should *glorify God*." To be sure, the death of the believer is for the glory of God. But not every believer glorifies God in death. God is glorified by our activity and our service, but oftentimes He is glorified in a greater measure by the manner of the believer's death than by his life. Scores of instances could be given of a godly mother or a godly father or both who went through life with the burden of their unsaved children. At the homegoing of the parent, the child was shaken to his senses and suddenly realized his need of conversion. Frequently God is glorified in the salvation of souls

who before the death of a loved one were hardened in their sin against God.

When the Lord Jesus "had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me," or more literally, "Travel with Me." Doubtless this meant to follow along with our Lord by the lakeside. But even more, it must have meant, "Follow along with Me, Peter, in the same steps I have taken, even to the cross. Do not be ashamed, but be 'steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord,'" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Peter followed his master as they walked along the shore of the sea of Tiberias. But the apostle took only a few steps before he turned his eyes from Christ. "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" The apostle in question was John the beloved. Peter's future had been made known. Now he was concerned about John's future. There are some who feel that Peter was prompted to ask his question because of his sincere concern for John. It is possible, too, that Peter was not altogether at ease after hearing of the kind of death he must face. Thus the thought must have been in his mind, "If I am to die by crucifixion, how will the beloved apostle die?"

Our Lord's reply bore instruction as well as rebuke. "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me." Each believer has a personal relationship to Christ that is not in any way dependent upon anyone else. God has a purpose and a plan for each of us which can never be a pattern for others.

Christ said to Peter, "If I will." If it was our Lord's plan that John live until the second coming, this was God's will for John, and Peter had no right to question it. If believers were to get hold of these important truths, they would be saved much misery and sadness. We bring so much trouble upon ourselves by interfering with someone else's life. Such frequently leads to

the heinous sins of criticism and gossip, which result in misunderstanding and enmity.

How slow the disciples were to perceive truth. Instead of grasping our Lord's lesson, they communicated His words to others, thus creating an erroneous report about John. "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" How careful we must be of false reports. So often they spread like wildfire. Gossip has done more to disrupt the unity of believers than any other single evil.

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true." Not only was John the scribe, he was a "true" scribe. With his usual sincere humility John omits his name but he assures us that all he has written is the truth of God. Indeed, he was one of the "holy men of God" who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." The apostle was guided by the Holy Spirit into selecting only certain miracles and incidents from the life of our Lord in fulfilling his purpose in writing this book: "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). There was much Jesus said and did that has never been recorded in any book. In fact, John suggests that it would be impossible to record everything about Him. But to be sure, if nothing more were written regarding Christ than what we have in John's Gospel, this is enough to verify that Christ is the Son of God, and apart from Him there is no salvation.

Someone has declared John's Gospel to be the greatest book in the world. This is not an overstatement. You and I who love Christ ought to do all we possibly can to distribute the Gospel of John among the unsaved. It should go to every far corner of the earth, to every tribe and every nation, in every language.

In conclusion, let us give further thought to the supreme truth of this Gospel—the absolute necessity of trusting Christ for salvation. One may be familiar with the contents of the book. He may be able to quote many of its verses. Yet it is possible that he has not had a personal encounter with the Son of God. If you have any doubt whatsoever of your own personal relationship to Christ, will you bow your head and call upon the Lord Jesus Christ at this very moment? Do not let another day pass without being born again. There are many who spend their time on that which they consider to be of vital importance while completely ignoring that which is essential to their eternal welfare—a personal reception of the Son of God into the life. I beseech you not to make this tragic mistake. Everything is prepared for you. Christ died on the cross, paying the only sufficient price that could be paid for your sins. He rose again from the grave, that you might possess “a living hope.”





# JOHN

## ... LIVING ETERNALLY

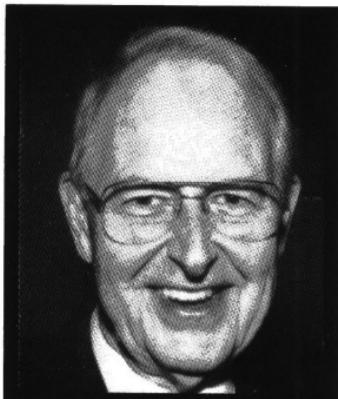
LIFE — the primary instinct of every human being . . .

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Many know him for his strong emphasis on victorious Christian living. All proceeds from his books go into the radio ministry.

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