

# An EXPOSITION of the Gospel of JOHN

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*by A.W. Pink*

Volume One

John 1:1 – 7:53

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# INTRODUCTION

It is our purpose to give (D. V.) a verse by verse exposition of the fourth Gospel in the course of this series of studies, but before turning to the opening verses of chapter I it will be necessary to consider John's Gospel as a whole, with the endeavor of discovering its scope, its central theme, and its relation to the other three Gospels. We shall not waste the reader's time by entering into a discussion as to who wrote this fourth Gospel, as to where John was when he wrote it, nor as to the probable date when it was written. These may be points of academic interest, but they provide no food for the soul, nor do they afford any help to an understanding of this section of the Bible, and these are the two chief things we desire to accomplish. Our aim is to open up the Scriptures in such a way that the reader will be able to enter into the meaning of what God has recorded for our learning in this part of His Holy Word, and to edify those who are members of the Household of Faith.

The four Gospels deal with the earthly life of the Savior, but each one presents Him in an entirely different character. Matthew portrays the Lord Jesus as the Son of David, the Heir of Israel's throne, the King of the Jews; and everything in his Gospel contributes to this central theme. In Mark, Christ is seen as the Servant of Jehovah, the perfect Workman of God; and everything in this second Gospel brings out the characteristics of His service and the manner in which He served. Luke treats of the humanity of the Savior, and presents Him as the perfect Man, contrasting Him from the sinful sons of men. The fourth Gospel views Him as the Heavenly One come down to earth, the eternal Son of the Father made flesh and tabernacling among men, and from start to finish this is the one dominant truth which is steadily held in view.

As we turn to the fourth Gospel we come to entirely different ground from that which is traversed in the other three. It is true, the period of time covered by it is the same as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, some of the incidents treated of by the "Synoptics" come before us here, and He who has occupied the central position in the narratives of the first three Evangelists is the same One that is made pre-

eminent by John; but otherwise, everything is entirely new. The viewpoint of this fourth Gospel is more elevated than that of the others; its contents bring into view spiritual relationships rather than human ties; and, higher glories are revealed as touching the peerless Person of the Savior. In each of the first three Gospels Christ is viewed in human relationships, but not so in John. The purpose of this fourth Gospel is to show that the One who was born in a manger and afterward died on the Cross had higher glories than those of King, that He who humbled Himself to take the Servant place was, previously, “equal with God,” that the One who became the Son of Man was none other than, and ever remains, the Only Begotten of the Father.

Each book of the Bible has a prominent and dominant theme which is peculiar to itself. Just as each member in the human body has its own particular function, so every book in the Bible has its own special purpose and mission. The theme of John’s Gospel is the Deity of the Savior. Here, as nowhere else in Scripture so fully, the Godhood of Christ is presented to our view. That which is outstanding in this fourth Gospel is the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. In this Book we are shown that the One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of Glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Here is a theme worthy of our most prayerful attention. If the Holy Spirit took such marked care to guard the perfections of our Lord’s humanity- seen for example, in the words of the angel to Mary “that Holy *Thing* which shall be born of thee,” “made in the *likeness* of sin’s flesh,” etc. — equally so has the Inspirer of the Scriptures seen to it that there is no uncertainty touching the Divine Sonship of our Savior. Just as the Old Testament prophets made known that the Coming One should be a Man, a perfect Man, so did Messianic prediction give plain intimation that He should be more than a man. Through Isaiah God foretold, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and

His name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, *The Mighty God*, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Through Micah He declared, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth have been *from the days of eternity.*” Through Zechariah He said, “Awake, O Sword, against my Shepherd, and against *the man that is my Fellow*, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” Through the Psalmist He announced, “The Lord *said unto my Lord*, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” And again, when looking forward to the second advent, “Thou art *my Son*; this day have I begotten thee (or, ‘brought thee forth’).” In these days of wide-spread departure from the faith, it cannot be insisted upon too strongly or too frequently that the Lord Jesus is none other than the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, co- eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In keeping with the special theme of this fourth Gospel, it is here we have the full unveiling of Christ’s Divine glories. It is here that we behold Him dwelling with God before time began and before ever the creature was formed (John 1:1, 2). It is here that He is denominated

“The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”  
(John 1:14).

It is here we read of John the Baptist bearing record

“that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

It is here that we read

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and *manifested forth his glory*” (John 2:11).

It is here we are told that the Savior said

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”  
(John 2:19).

It is here we learn that

“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (John 3:35).

It is in this Gospel we hear Christ saying,

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (John 5:21-23).

It is here we find Him declaring,

“Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

It is here He affirmed

“I and my Father are One” (John 10:30).

It is here He testifies

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Before we take up John’s Gospel in detail, a few words should also be said concerning the scope of the fourth Gospel. It must be evident at once that this is quite different from the other three. There, Christ is seen in human relationships, and as connected with an earthly people; but here He is viewed in a Divine relationship, and as connected with a heavenly people. It is true the mystery of the “Body” is not unfolded here — that is found only in what the Apostle Paul wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit — rather is it the Family relationship which is here in view: the Son of God together with the sons of God. It is also true that the “heavenly calling,” as such, is not fully unfolded here, yet are there plain intimations of it, as a careful study of it makes apparent. In the first three Gospels Christ is seen connected with the Jews, proclaiming the Messianic kingdom, a proclamation which ceased, however, as soon as it became evident that the nation had rejected Him. But here in John’s Gospel His rejection is anticipated from the beginning, for in the very first chapter we are told, “He came unto his own, *and his own received him not.*” The limitations which obtain in connection with much which is found in the first three Gospels does not,

therefore, obtain in John's. Again, in John's Gospel the Savior is displayed as the Son of God, and as such He can be known only by believers. On this plane, then, the Jew has no priority. The Jew's claim upon Christ was purely a *fleshly* one (arising from the fact that He was "the Son of David"), whereas believers are related to the Son of God by *spiritual* union.

As there may be some of our readers who have been influenced by ultra- dispensational teaching we deem it well to here call attention to other points which help to fix the true dispensational bearings and scope of this fourth Gospel. There are those who make no distinction between John's Gospel and the Synoptics, and who insist that this fourth Gospel is entirely Jewish, and has nothing but a remote application to believers of the present dispensation. But this, we are assured, is a serious mistake. John's Gospel, like his Epistles, concerns *the family of God*. In proof of this we request the reader to weigh carefully the following points:

**First**, in John 1:11-13 we read,

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 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; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

From these verses we may notice three things: first, the Jews as a nation rejected the Sent One of the Father, they "received him not;" second, a company did "receive him," even those that "believed on his name"; third, this company are here designated "the sons of God," who were "born.... of God." There is nothing which in any wise resembles this in the other Gospels. Here only, in the four Gospels, is the truth of the new birth brought before us. And it is by new birth we enter the family of God. As, then, the family of God reaches out beyond Jewish believers, and takes in all Gentile believers too, we submit that John's Gospel cannot be restricted to the twelve-tribed people.

**Second**, after stating that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, "and *we* beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father (which is a glory that none but believers

behold!), full of grace and truth,” and after summarizing John the Baptist’s witness to the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit through the Evangelist goes on to say, “and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. Surely this verse alone establishes the point of *who* it is that is here being addressed. The Jewish nation never received “of his fulness” — *that* can be predicated of believers only. The “all we” of verse 16 is the “*as many as*” received Him, to them gave He power to become “*the sons of God*” of verse 12.

**Third**, in the tenth chapter of John, we read that the Savior said,

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep” (verses 14, 15). Immediately following this He went on to say,

“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” (verse 16).

Who were these “other sheep?” Before we can answer this, we must ascertain who were the “sheep” referred to by Christ in the first fifteen verses of this chapter. As to who they were there can be only one answer: they were not the nation of Israel as such, for they had “received him not”; no, they were the little company who *had* “received him,” who had “believed on his name.” But Christ goes on to speak of a future company of believers, “*other sheep I have* (speaking as God who calleth those things which be not as though they were: Romans 4:17), them also I must bring.” Clearly, the “*other sheep*” which had not been brought into the fold at the time the Savior then spake, were believers from among the Gentiles, and these, together with the Jewish believers, should be “one fold” (or, better “one flock”), which is the equivalent of one family, the family of God.

**Fourth**, in John 11:49-52 we read,

“and 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. 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.”

This was a remarkable prophecy, and contained far more in it than Caiaphas was aware. It made known the Divine purpose in the death of the Savior and revealed what was to be the outcome of the great Sacrifice. It looked out far beyond the bounds of Judaism, including within its range believing sinners from the Gentiles. The “children of God that were scattered abroad” were the elect found among all nations. That they were here termed “children of God” while viewed as still “scattered abroad,” gives us the *Divine* viewpoint, being parallel with “other sheep I have.” But what we desire to call special attention to is the declaration that these believers from among the Gentiles were to be “gathered together in one,” not into one “body” (for as previously said, the body does not fall within the scope of John’s writings), but one family, the family of God.

**Fifth**, in John 14:2, 3 we read that Christ said to His disciples,

“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.”

How entirely different this is from anything that is to be found in the first three Gospels scarcely needs to be pointed out. In them, reference is invariably made to the coming of “the Son of man,” but here it is the rapture of the saints to heaven, and the taking of them to be where Christ now is that is expressly mentioned. And manifestly this can in no wise be limited to Jewish believers.

**Sixth**, without attempting to develop this point at any length it should be noticed that the relation which the Holy Spirit sustains to believers in this Gospel is entirely different from what is before us in the first three. Here only do we read of being “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5). Here only is He denominated their “Comforter” or Advocate (John 14:16); and here only do we read of Him “abiding forever” with believers (John 14:16).

**Seventh**, the High Priestly prayer of the Savior which is recorded in John 17, and found nowhere else in the Gospels, shows plainly that more than Jewish believers are here contemplated, and evidences the wider scope of this fourth Gospel. Here we find the Savior saying, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over *all flesh*, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The "as many as thou hast given him" takes in the whole family of God. Again, in verse 20 the Lord Jesus says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which *shall believe on me through their word*:" the "these" evidently refers to Jewish believers, while the "them also" looked forward to Gentile believers. Finally, His words in verse 22, "and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; *that they may be one, even as we are one*" shows, once more, that the whole family of God was here before Him.

In bringing this chapter to a close we want to prepare the reader for the second of the series. In the next chapter we shall (D.V.) take up the first section of the opening chapter, and it is our earnest desire that many of our readers will make these verses the subject of prayerful study and meditation. The Bible teacher who becomes a substitute for diligent study on the part of those who hear him is a hindrance and not a help. The business of the teacher is to turn people to the searching of the Scriptures for themselves, stimulating their interest in the Sacred Word, and instructing them how to go about it. With this end in view, it will be our aim to prepare a series of questions at the close of each chapter bearing on the passage to be expounded in the succeeding one, so that the reader may study it for himself. Below are seven questions on the passage for the portion we shall take up in the next lesson, and we earnestly urge our readers to study the first thirteen verses of John 1, and to concentrate upon the points raised by our questions.

What "beginning" is referred to in John 1:1?

How may I obtain a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of God Himself? By studying nature? By prayer? By studying Scripture? Or — how?

*Why* is the Lord Jesus here termed "The Word?" What is the exact force and significance of this title?

What is the meaning of John 1:4 — “The *Life* was the *Light* of men?”

The fact that the Savior is termed “the Light” in John 1:7, teaches us *what*?

What does John 1:12 teach concerning what a sinner must do to be saved?

What is the exact meaning of each clause in John 1:13?

Pray over and meditate much upon each of these questions, and above all “Search the Scriptures” to find God’s answers. Answers to these questions will be found in the next chapter, in the course of our exposition of John 1:1-13.

# JOHN 1:1-13

## CHRIST, THE ETERNAL WORD

In the last chapter we stated,

“Each book of the Bible has a prominent and dominant theme which is peculiar to itself. Just as each member in the human body has its own particular function, so, every book in the Bible has its own special purpose and mission. The theme of John’s Gospel is *the Deity of the Savior*. Here, as nowhere else in Scripture so fully, the Godhood of Christ is presented to our view. That which is outstanding in this fourth Gospel is the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. In this book we are shown that the One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary, who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before ‘the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ’ (Titus 2:13).”

That John’s Gospel *does* present the Deity of the Savior is at once apparent from the opening words of the first chapter. The Holy Spirit has, as it were, placed the key right over the entrance, for the introductory verses of this fourth Gospel present the Lord Jesus Christ in Divine relationships and unveil His essential glories. Before we attempt an exposition of this profound passage we shall first submit an analysis of its contents. In these first thirteen verses of John 1 we have set forth: —

1. The Relation of Christ to Time — “In the beginning,” therefore, Eternal: John 1:1.
2. The Relation of Christ to the Godhead — “With God,” therefore, One of the Holy Trinity: John 1:1.
3. The Relation of Christ to the Holy Trinity — “God was the Word” — the Revealer: John 1:1.
4. The Relation of Christ to the Universe — “All things were made by him” — the Creator: John 1:3.

5. The Relation of Christ to Men — Their “Light”: John 1:4, 5.
6. The Relation of John the Baptist to Christ — “Witness” of His Deity: John 1:6-9.
7. The Reception which Christ met here: John 1:10-13.
  - (a) “The world knew him not”: John 1:10.
  - (b) “His own (Israel) received him not”: John 1:11.
  - (c) A company born of God “received him”: John 1:12, 13.

“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. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

How entirely different is this from the opening verses of the other Gospels! John opens by immediately presenting Christ not as the Son of David, nor as the Son of man, but as the Son of God. John takes us back to the beginning, and shows that the Lord Jesus had no beginning. John goes behind creation and shows that the Savior was Himself the Creator. Every clause in these verses calls for our most careful and prayerful attention.

“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” Here we enter a realm which transcends the finite mind, and where speculation is profane. “In the *beginning*” is something we are unable to comprehend: it is one of those matchless sweeps of inspiration which rises above the level of human thought. “In the beginning *was the word,*” and we are equally unable to grasp the final meaning of this. A “word” is an expression: by words we articulate our speech. The *Word* of God, then, is Deity expressing itself in audible terms. And yet, when we have said this, how much there is that we leave unsaid! “And the word was *with* God,” and this intimates His separate personality, and shows His relation to the other Persons of the blessed Trinity. But how sadly incapacitated are we for meditating upon the relations which exist between the different Persons of the Godhead. “And *God was the word.*” Not only was Christ the Revealer of God, but He always was, and ever remains, none other than God Himself. Not only was our Savior the One through whom, and by whom, the Deity expressed itself in audible terms, but He was Himself co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. Let us now approach the Throne of grace and there seek the

mercy and grace we so sorely need to help us as we turn now to take a closer look at these verses.

“Our God and Father, in the name of Thy dear Son, we pray Thee that Thy Holy Spirit may now take of the things of Christ and show them unto us: to the praise of the glory of Thy grace. Amen.”

“*In THE BEGINNING,*” or, more literally, “in beginning,” for there is no article in the Greek. In what “beginning?” There are various “beginnings” referred to in the New Testament. There is the “beginning” of “the world” (Matthew 24:21); of “the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1); of “sorrows” (Mark 13:8); of “miracles” (or “signs”), (John 2:11), etc. But the “beginning” mentioned in John 1:1 clearly antedates all these “beginnings.” The “beginning” of John 1:1 *precedes* the making of the “all things” of John 1:3. It is then, *the beginning of creation, the beginning of time.* This earth of ours is old, how old we do not know, possibly millions of years. But “the word” was before all things. He was not only *from* the beginning, but He was “*in* the beginning.”

“In beginning:” the absence of the definite article is designed to carry us back to the most remote point that can be imagined. If then, He was before all creation, and He was, for “all things were made by *him*,” if He was “in the beginning,” then He was Himself *without beginning*, which is only the negative way of saying He was *eternal*. In perfect accord with this we find, that in His prayer recorded in John 17, He said, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee *before the world was.*” As, then, the Word was “in the beginning,” and if in the beginning, eternal, and as none but God Himself is eternal, the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus is conclusively established.

“*WAS the word.*” There are two separate words in the Greek which, in this passage, are both rendered “was”: the one means to exist, the other to *come into being*. The latter word (*egeneto*) is used in John 1:3 which, literally rendered, reads, “all things through him *came into being*, and without him came into being not even one (thing) which has *come into being*,” and again we have this word “*egeneto*” in John 1:6 where we read, “there was (became to be) a man sent from God, whose name was John;” and again in John 1:14, “And the

word *was made* (became) flesh.” But here in John 1:1 and John 1:2 it is “the word (*ito*) with God.” As the Word He did not come into being, or begin to be, but He was “with God” from all eternity. It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit uses this word “*ito*,” which signifies that the Son *personally subsisted*, no less than four times in the first two verses of John 1. Unlike John the Baptist who “*became* (egeneto) a man,” the “word” *was (ito), that is, existed* with God before time began.

“*Was THE WORD.*” The reference here is to the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, the Son of God. But why is the Lord Jesus Christ designated “the word?” What is the exact force and significance of this title? The first passage which occurs to our minds as throwing light on this question is the opening statement in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “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.” Here we learn that Christ is the final spokesman of God. Closely connected with this is the Savior’s title found in Revelation 1:8 — “I am Alpha and Omega,” which intimates that He is *God’s alphabet*, the One who spells out Deity, the One who utters all God has to say. Even clearer, perhaps, is the testimony of John 1:18:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath *declared him.*”

The word “declared” means *tell out*, cf. Acts 15:14, and 21:19; it is translated “told” in Luke 24:35. Putting together these three passages we learn that Christ is the One who is the Spokesman of God, and One who spelled out the Deity, the One who has declared or told forth the Father.

Christ, then, is the One who has made the incomprehensible God intelligible. The force of this title of His found in John 1:1, may be discovered by comparing it with that name which is given to the Holy Scriptures — “the Word of God.” What are the Scriptures? They are the Word of God. And what does that mean? This: the Scriptures reveal God’s mind, express His will, make known His perfections, and lay bare His heart. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus has done for the Father. But let us enter a little more into detail: —

(a) A “word” is a *medium of manifestation*. I have in my mind a thought, but others know not its nature. But the moment I clothe that thought in words it becomes cognizable. Words, then, make objective unseen thoughts. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus has done. As the Word, Christ has made manifest the invisible God.

(b) A “word” is a *means of communication*. By means of words I transmit information to others. By words I express myself, make known my will, and impart knowledge. So Christ, as the Word, is the Divine Transmitter, communicating to us the life and love of God.

(c) A “word” is a *method of revelation*. By his words a speaker exhibits both his intellectual caliber and his moral character. By our words we shall be justified, and by our ‘words we shall be condemned. And Christ, as the Word, reveals the attributes and perfections of God. How *fully* has Christ revealed God! He displayed His power, He manifested His wisdom, He exhibited His holiness, He made known His grace, He unveiled His heart. In Christ, and nowhere else, is God fully and finally told out.

“*And the word was WITH GOD.*” This preposition “with” seems to suggest two thoughts. First, the Word was in the presence of God. As we read, “Enoch walked *with* God,” that is, he lived in fellowship with God. There is a beautiful verse in Proverbs 8 which throws its light on the meaning of “with” in John 1:1, and reveals the blessed relation which obtained from all eternity between the Word and God. The passage begins at John 8:22 where “wisdom” is personified. It tells us of the happy fellowship which existed between the Word and God before ever the world was. In John 8:30 we read,

“Then I was *by him*, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.”

In addition to the two thoughts just suggested, we may add that the Greek preposition “pros” here translated “with” is sometimes rendered “toward,” but most frequently “unto.” The Word was toward or unto God. One has significantly said, “The word rendered with denotes a perpetual tendency, as it were, of the Son to the Father, in unity of essence.”

That it is here said “the word was with God” tells of His *separate personality*: He was not “in” God, but “with” God. Now, mark here the marvelous accuracy of Scripture. It is not said, “the word was with the Father” as we might have expected, but “the word was with God.” The name “God” is common to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas “the Father” is the special title of the first Person only. Had it said “the word was with the Father,” the Holy Spirit had been excluded; but “with God” takes in the Word dwelling in eternal fellowship with both the Father and the Spirit. Observe, too, it does not say, “And God was with God,” for while there is plurality of Persons in the Godhead, there is but “one God,” therefore the minute accuracy of “the WORD was with God.”

“*And the word WAS GOD,*” or, more literally, “and God was the word.” Lest the figurative expression “the word” should convey to us an inadequate conception of the Divine glories of Christ, the Holy Spirit goes on to say, “and the word was with God,” which denoted His separate personality, and intimated His essential relation to the Godhead. And, as though that were not strong enough, the Holy Spirit expressly adds, “and God was the word.” Who could express God save Him who is God! The Word was not an emanation of God, but God Himself made manifest. Not only the revealer of God, but God Himself revealed. A more emphatic and unequivocal affirmation of the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ it is impossible to conceive.

“The same was in the beginning with God.” The same,” that is, the Word; “was,” that is, subsisted, not began to be; “in the beginning,” that is, before time commenced; “with God,” that is, as a distinct Personality. That it is here repeated Christ was “with God,” seems to be intended as a repudiation of the early Gnostic heresy that Christ was only an *idea* or *ideal* IN the mind of God from eternity, duly made manifest in time — a horrible heresy which is being reechoed in our own day. It is not said that the Word was in God; He was, eternally, “*with* God.”

Before we pass on to the next verse, let us seek to make practical application of what has been before us, and at the same time answer the third of the seven questions asked at the close of the previous chapter; “How may I obtain a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of

God Himself? By studying nature? By prayer? By studying Scripture? Or — how?” A more important question we cannot consider. What conception have you formed, dear reader, of the Being, Personality, and Character, of God? Before the Lord Jesus came to this earth, the world was without the knowledge of the true and living God. To say that God is revealed in nature is true, yet it is a statement which needs qualifying. Nature reveals the existence of God, but how little it tells of His character. Nature manifests His *natural* attribute is power, His wisdom, His immutability, etc.; but what does nature say to us of His *moral* attributes — His justice, His holiness, His grace, His love? Nature, as such knows no mercy and shows no pity. If a blind saint unwittingly steps over the edge of a precipice he meets with the same fate as if a vile murderer had been hurled over it. If I break nature’s laws, no matter how sincere may be my subsequent repentance, there is no escaping the penalty. Nature conceals as well as reveals God. The ancients had “nature” before them, and what did they learn of God? Let that altar, which the Apostle Paul beheld in one of the chief centers of ancient learning and culture make answer — “to the UNKNOWN GOD” is what he found inscribed thereon!

It is only in Christ that God is fully told out. Nature is no longer as it left the Creator’s hands: it is under the Curse, and how could that which is imperfect be a perfect medium for revealing God? But the Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy One. He was God, the Son, manifest in flesh. And so fully and so perfectly did He reveal God, He could say, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Here, then, is the answer to our question, and here is the practical value of what is before us in these opening verses of John’s Gospel. If the believer would enter into a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of God, he must prayerfully study the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures! Let this be made our chief business, our great delight, to reverently scrutinize and meditate upon the excellencies of our Divine Savior as they are displayed upon the pages of Holy Writ, then, and only then, shall we “increase in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10). The “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is seen only “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

“All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3).

How this brings out, again, the absolute deity of Christ! Here creation is ascribed to Him, and none but *God* can create. Man, with all his boasting, is unable to bring into existence a single blade of grass. Observe, that the whole of creation is here ascribed to the Word — “*all* things were made by him.” This would not be true if He were Himself a creature, even though the first and the highest creature. But nothing is excepted — “all things were made by *him*.” Just as He was before all things, and therefore, *eternal*; so was He the Originator of all things, and therefore, *omnipotent*.

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

This follows logically from what has been said in the previous verse. If Christ created all things He must be the Fountain of *life*. He is the Life- Giver. We understand “life” to be used here in its widest sense. Creature life is found in God, for “in him we live and move and have our being”; spiritual life or eternal life, and resurrection life, are also found “in Him.” If it be objected that the Greek word for “life” here is “*zoe*,” and that *zoe* has exclusive reference to spiritual life, we answer, Not always: see Luke 12:15; Luke 16:25 (translated “life-time”), Acts 17:25, etc., where, in each case, “*zoe*” has reference to human (natural) life, as such. Thus, “*zoe*” includes within its scope *all* “life.”

“*And the Life was THE LIGHT of men.*” What are we to understand by this? Notice two things: this statement in verse 4 follows immediately after the declaration that “all things were made” by Christ, so that it is creatures, as such, which are here in view; second, it is “men,” as men, not only believers, which are here referred to. The “life” here is one of the Divine titles of the Lord Jesus, hence, it is equivalent to saying, “God was the *light* of men.” It speaks of the relation which Christ sustains to men, all men — He is their “light.” This is confirmed by what we read in verse 9, “That was the true light, which *lighteth every man* that cometh into the world.” In what sense, then, is Christ as “the life” the “light of

men?” We answer, In that which renders men accountable creatures. Every rational man is morally enlightened. All rational men

“show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Romans 2:15).

It is this “light,” which lightens every man that cometh into the world, that constitutes them responsible human beings. The Greek word for “light” in John 1:4 is “phos,” and that it is not restricted to spiritual illumination is plainly evident from its usage in Matthew 6:23,

“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness,”

and also see Luke 11:35; Acts 16:29, etc.

Let no reader infer from what has been said that we are among the number who believe the unscriptural theory that there is in every man a spark of Divine life, which needs only to be fanned, to become a flame. No, we expressly repudiate any such satanic lie. By nature, spiritually, he is “dead in trespasses and sins.” Yet, notwithstanding, the natural man is a responsible being before God, to Whom he shall give an account of himself; responsible, because the work of God’s law is written in his heart, his conscience also bearing witness, and this, we take it, is the “light” which is referred to in John 1:4, and the “lighteneth” in John 1:9.

“And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5).

This gives us still another of the Divine titles of Christ. In verse 1 He is spoken of as “the word.” In verse 3 as the Maker of all things. In verse 4 as “the life.” Now, in verse 5 as “the light.” With this should be compared 1 John 1:5 where we read “*God is light.*” The conclusion, then, is irresistible, the proof complete and final, that the Lord Jesus is none other than God, the second Person in the Holy Trinity.

The “Englishman’s Greek New Testament” renders the last clause of John 1:5 as follows — “and the light in the darkness appears, and the darkness it apprehended not.” This tells us of the effects of the

Fall. Every man that comes into this world is lightened by his Creator, but the natural man disregards this light, he repels it, and in consequence, is plunged into darkness. Instead of the natural man “living up to the light he has” (which none ever did) he “loves darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). The unregenerate man, then, is like one that is blind — he is in the dark. Proof of this appears in the fact that “the Light in the darkness appears, and the darkness apprehended it not.” All other darkness yields to and fades away before light, but here “*the darkness*” is so impenetrable and hopeless, it neither apprehends nor comprehends. What a fearful and solemn indictment of fallen human nature! And how evident it is that nothing short of a miracle of saving grace can ever bring one “out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.”

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John”  
(John 1:6).

The change of subject here is most abrupt. From “the Word” who was God, the Holy Spirit now turns to speak of the forerunner of Christ. He is referred to as “*a man*,” to show us, by way of contrast, that the One to Whom he bore witness was more than Man. This man was “sent from God,” so is every man who bears faithful witness to the Person of Christ. The name of this man was “John” which, as etymologists tell us, signifies “the gift of God.”

“The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light,  
that all through him might believe” (John 1:7).

John came to bear witness of “the light.” Weigh well these words: they are solemn, pathetic, tragic. Perhaps their force will be the more evident if we ask a question: When the sun is shining in all its beauty, who are the ones that are unconscious of the fact? Who need to be told it is shining? The blind! How tragic, then, when we read that God sent John to “bear witness of the light.” How pathetic that there should be any need for this! How solemn the statement that men have to be told “the light” is now in their midst. What a revelation of man’s fallen condition. The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. Therefore, did God send John to bear witness of the Light. God would not allow His beloved Son to come here unrecognized and unheralded. As soon as

He was born into this world, He sent the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds to proclaim Him, and just before His public ministry began, John appeared bidding Israel to receive Him.

“The same came *for a witness*.” This defines the character of the preacher’s office. He is a “witness,” and a witness is one who knows what he says and says what he knows. He deals not with speculations, he speaks not of his own opinions, but he testifies to what he knows to be the truth.

“To bear witness *of the light*.” This should ever be the aim of the preacher: to get his hearers to look away from himself to Another. He is not to testify of himself, nor about himself, but he is to “preach Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:23). This is the message the Spirit of God will own, for Christ has said of Him, “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14).

“That all through him might believe.” “That” means “in order that.” “To bear witness” defines the character of the preacher’s *office*: to “bear witness of the light” makes known the preacher’s theme; that “all through him might believe” speaks of the *design* of his ministry. Men become believers through receiving the testimony of God’s witness. The “all” is the same as in John 6:45.

“He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light” (John 1:8).

No, John himself was not “that light,” for “light” like “life” is to be found only in God. Apart from God all is darkness, profound and unrelieved. Even the believer has no light *in himself*. What saith the Scriptures?

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye the light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8).

There is a statement found in John 5:35 which, as it stands in the A.V., conflicts with what is said here in John 1:8. In verse 35 when speaking of John, Christ said, “He was a burning and shining *light*,” but the Greek word used here is entirely different from that translated “light” in John 1:8, and in the R.V. it is correctly translated “He was the lamp that burneth and shineth.” This word

used of John, correctly translated “lamp,” points a striking contrast between the forerunner and Christ as “the light.” A lamp has no inherent light of its own — it has to be supplied! A “lamp” has to be carried by another! A “lamp” soon burns out: in a few hours it ceases to shine.

“That was the true light, which lighteth every man which cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

Bishop Ryle in his most excellent notes on John’s Gospel, has suggested that the adjective “true” has here at least a fourfold reference.

**First**, Christ, is the “*true* light” as the Undeceiving Light. Satan himself, we read, “is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), but he appears as such only to *deceive*. But Christ is the true Light in contrast from all the false lights which are in the world.

**Second**, as the “true light,” Christ is the *Real* Light. The real light in contrast from the dim and shaded light which was conveyed through the types and shadows of the Old Testament ritual.

**Third**, as the “true light” Christ is the Underived Light: there are lesser lights which are borrowed and reflected, as the moon from the sun, but Christ’s “light” is His own essential and underived glory.

**Fourth**, as the “*true light*,” Christ is the Supereminent Light, in contrast from all that is ordinary and common. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another of the stars; but all other lights pale before Him who is “the light.” The latter part of this ninth verse need not detain us now, having already received our consideration under the exposition of verse four. The light which “every man” has by nature is the light and reason and conscience.

“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10).

“He was in the world” refers, we believe, to His incarnation and the thirty- three years during which He tabernacled among men. Then it is said “and the world was made by him.” This is to magnify the Divine glory of the One who had become incarnate, and to

emphasize the tragedy of what follows, “and the world knew him not.”

“He was in the world.” *Who* was? None other than the One who had made it. And how was He received? The great Creator was about to appear: will not a thrill of glad expectancy run around the world? He is coming not to judge, but to save. He is to appear not as a haughty Despot, but as a Man “holy, harmless, undefiled;” not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Will not such an One receive a hearty welcome? Alas, “the world knew him not.” Full of their own schemes and pursuits, they thought nothing of Him. Unspeakably tragic is this, yet something even more pathetic follows.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not”  
(John 1:11).

How appropriate are the terms here used: note the nice distinction: “He was in the world” and, therefore, within the reach of inquiry. But to the seed of Abraham He “came,” knocking as it were, at their door for admission; but “*they received him not.*” The world is charged with ignorance, but Israel with unbelief, yea, with a positive refusal of Him. Instead of welcoming the Heavenly Visitant, they drove Him from their door, and even banished Him from the earth. Who would have supposed that a people whose believing ancestors had been eagerly awaiting the appearance of the Messiah for long ages past, would have rejected Him when He came among them! Yet so it was: and should any ask, How could these things be? we answer, This very thing was expressly foretold by their own prophet, that He should possess neither form nor comeliness in their eyes, and when they should see Him there would be no beauty that they should desire Him. Ah! would it have been any wonder if He had turned away from such ingrates in disgust! What blessed subjection to the Father’s will, and what wondrous love for sinners, that He remained on earth in order that He might later die the death of the Cross!

But if the world “knew him not,” and Israel “received him not,” was the purpose of God defeated? No, indeed, for that *could not be*. The counsel of the Lord “shall stand”: (Proverbs 19:21). The marvelous condescension of the Son could not be in vain. So, we read, “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” (verse 12). This tells us of the human side of salvation, what is required of sinners. Salvation comes to the sinner through “receiving” Christ, that is, by “believing on his name.” There is a slight distinction between these two things, though in substance they are one. Believing, respects Christ as He is exhibited by the Gospel testimony: it is the personal acceptance as truth of what God has said concerning His Son. Receiving, views Christ as presented to us as God’s Gift, presented to us for our acceptance. And “as many as,” no matter whether they be Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, illiterate or learned, receive Christ as their own personal Savior, to them is given the power or right to become the sons (better “children”) of God.

But *who* receive Him thus? Not all by any means. Only a few. And is this left to chance? Far from it. As the following verse goes on to state,

“which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

This explains to us *why* the few “receive” Christ. It is because they are born of God. Just as verse 12 gives us the human side, so verse 13 gives us the Divine. The Divine side is the new birth: and the taking place of the new birth is “not of blood,” that is to say, it is not a matter of heredity, for regeneration does not run in the veins; “nor of the will of the flesh,” the will of the natural man is opposed to God, and he has *no will* Godward until he has been born again; “nor of the will of man,” that is to say, the new birth is not brought about by the well-meant efforts of friends, nor by the persuasive powers of the preacher; “but of God.” The new birth is a Divine work. It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit applying the Word in living power to the heart. The reception Christ met during the days of His earthly ministry is the same still: the world “knows him not;” Israel “receives him not;” but a little company *do* receive him, and who these are Acts 13:48 tells us — “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” And here we must stop.

Preparatory to our next chapter, we are anxious that the reader should study the following questions:

1. In John 1:14 the word “dwelt” signifies “tabernacled.” The Word tabernacled among men. It points us back to the Tabernacle of Israel in the wilderness. In what respects did the Tabernacle of old typify and foreshadow Christ?
2. “We beheld his glory” (John 1:14): what is meant by this? what “glory?” At least a threefold “glory.”
3. In what sense was Christ “before” John the Baptist (John 1:15)?
4. What is the meaning of John 1:16?
5. Why are we told that the law was given by Moses, but that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17)?
6. Was there any “grace and truth” before Jesus Christ came? If so, what is meant by them coming by Jesus Christ?
7. How many contrasts can you draw between Law and Grace?

# JOHN 1:14-18

## CHRIST, THE WORD INCARNATE

We first submit a brief Analysis of the passage which is to be before us — John 1:14-18. We have here: —

1. Christ's Incarnation — “The word became flesh”: John 1:14.
2. Christ's Earthly sojourn — “And tabernacled among us:” John 1:14.
3. Christ's Essential Glory — “As of the only Begotten:” John 1:14.
4. Christ's Supreme excellency — “Preferred before:” John 1:15.
5. Christ's Divine sufficiency — “His fulness:” John 1:16.
6. Christ's Moral perfections — “Grace and truth:” John 1:17.
7. Christ's Wondrous revelation — Made known “the Father:” John 1:18.

“And the word was made (became) flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The Infinite became finite. The Invisible became tangible. The Transcendent became imminent. That which was far off drew nigh. That which was beyond the reach of the human mind became that which could be beholden within the realm of human life. Here we are permitted to see through a veil that, which unveiled, would have blinded us. “The word became flesh:” He became what He was not previously. He did not cease to be God, but He became Man.

“And the word became flesh.” The plain meaning of these words is, that our Divine Savior took upon Him human nature. He became a real Man, yet a sinless, perfect Man. As Man He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). This union of the two natures in the Person of Christ is one of the mysteries of our faith —

“Without controversy *great is the mystery* of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

It needs to be carefully stated. “The word” was His Divine title; “became flesh” speaks of His holy humanity. He was, and is, the God-man, yet the Divine and human in Him were never confounded. His Deity, though veiled, was never laid aside; His humanity, though sinless, was a real humanity; for as incarnate, He “*increased* in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). As “the word” then, He is the Son of God; as “flesh,” the Son of man.

This union of the two natures in the Person of Christ was necessary in order to fit Him for the office of Mediator. Three great ends were accomplished by God becoming incarnate, by the Word being made flesh.

**First**, it was now possible for Him *to die*.

**Second**, He can now be touched with the feeling of *our* infirmities.

**Third**, He has left us an example, that we should follow *His* steps.

This duality of nature was plainly intimated in Old Testament prediction. Prophecy sometimes represented the coming Messiah as human, sometimes as Divine. He was to be the woman’s “seed” (Genesis 3:15); a “prophet” like unto Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:18); a lineal descendant of David (see 2 Samuel 7:12); Jehovah’s “Servant” (Isaiah 42:1); a “Man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). Yet, on the other hand, He was to be “the Branch of the Lord, beautiful and glorious” (Isaiah 4:2); He was “the wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of the ages, the Prince of peace” (Isaiah 9:6). As Jehovah He was to come suddenly to His temple (see Malachi 3:1). The One who was to be born in Bethlehem and be Ruler in Israel, was the One “whose goings forth had been from the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2). How were those two different sets of prophecy to be harmonized? John 1:14 is the answer. The One born at Bethlehem was the Divine and eternal Word. The Incarnation does not mean that God dwelt in a man, but that God became Man. He became what He was not previously, though He never ceased to be all that He was before. The Babe of Bethlehem was Immanuel — God with us.

“And the word became flesh.” It is the design of John’s Gospel to bring this out in a special way. The miracles recorded therein illustrate and demonstrate this in a peculiar manner. For example: He turns the water into wine — but how? He, Himself, did nothing but *speaking the word*. He gave His command to the servants and the transformation was wrought. Again; the nobleman’s son was sick. The father came to the Lord Jesus and besought Him to journey to his home and heal his boy. What was our Lord’s response? “Jesus said unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth” (John 4:50), and the miracle was performed. Again; an impotent man was lying by the porch of Bethesda. He desired some one to put him into the pool, but while he was waiting another stepped in before him, and was healed. Then the Lord Jesus passed that way and saw him. What happened? “Jesus saith unto him, Rise,” etc. The word of power went forth, and the sufferer was made whole. Once more: consider the case of Lazarus, recorded only by John. In the raising of the daughter of Jairus, Christ took the damsel by the hand; when He restored to life the widow’s son of Nain, He touched the bier. But in bringing Lazarus from the dead He did nothing except speak the word, “Lazarus, come forth.” In all of these miracles we see the Word at work. The One who had become flesh and tabernacled among men was eternal and omnipotent —

“the great God (the Word) and our Savior (became flesh)  
Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13).

1. “And dwelt (*tabernacled*) among us.” He pitched His tent on earth for thirty-three years. There is here a latent reference to the tabernacle of Israel in the wilderness. That tabernacle had a typical significance: it foreshadowed God the Son incarnate. Almost everything about the tabernacle adumbrated the Word made flesh. Many and varied are the correspondences between the type and the Anti-type. We notice a few of the more conspicuous.

2. The “tabernacle” was a temporary appointment. In this it differed from the temple of Solomon, which was a permanent structure. The tabernacle was merely a tent, a temporary convenience, something that was suited to be moved about from place to place during the journeyings of the children of Israel. So it was when our blessed Lord tabernacled here among men. His stay was but a brief one —

less than forty years; and, like the type, He abode not long in any one place, but was constantly on the move — unwearied in the activity of His love.

The “tabernacle” was for *use in the wilderness*. After Israel settled in Canaan, the tabernacle was superseded by the temple. But during the time of their pilgrimage from Egypt to the promised land, the tabernacle was God’s appointed provision for them. The wilderness strikingly foreshadowed the conditions amid which the eternal Word tabernacled among men at His first advent. The *wilderness* home of the tabernacle unmistakably foreshadowed the manger-cradle, the Nazarite-carpenter’s bench, the “nowhere” for the Son of man to lay His head, the borrowed tomb for His sepulcher. A careful study of the chronology of the Pentateuch seems to indicate that Israel used the tabernacle in the wilderness rather less than thirty-five years!

3. *Outwardly the “tabernacle” was mean, humble, and unattractive in appearance.* Altogether unlike the costly and magnificent temple of Solomon, there was nothing in the externals of the tabernacle to please the carnal eye. Nothing but plain boards and skins. So it was at the Incarnation. The Divine majesty of our Lord was hidden beneath a veil of flesh. He came, unattended by any imposing retinue of angels. To the unbelieving gaze of Israel He had no form nor comeliness; and when they beheld Him, their unanointed eyes saw in Him no beauty that they should desire Him.

4. The “tabernacle” was *God’s dwelling place*. It was there, in the midst of Israel’s camp, He took up His abode. There, between the cherubim upon the mercy-seat He made His throne. In the holy of holies He manifested His presence by means of the Shekinah glory. And during the thirty-three years that the Word tabernacled among men, God had His dwelling place in Palestine. The holy of holies received its anti-typical fulfillment in the Person of the Holy One of God. Just as the Shekinah dwelt between the two cherubim, so on the mount of transfiguration the glory of the God-man flashed forth from between two men — Moses and Elijah. “We beheld his *glory*” is the *language* of the tabernacle type.

5. The “tabernacle” was, therefore, the *place where God met with men*. It was termed “the tent of meeting.” If an Israelite desired to

draw near unto Jehovah He had to come to the door of the tabernacle. When giving instructions to Moses concerning the making of the tabernacle and its furniture, God said, “And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee” (Exodus 25:21, 22). How perfect is this lovely type! Christ is the meetingplace between God and men. No man cometh unto the Father but by Him (see John 14:16). There is but one Mediator between God and men — the Man Christ Jesus (see 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the One who spans the gulf between deity and humanity, because He is Himself both God and Man.

6. The “tabernacle” was the *center of Israel’s camp*. In the immediate vicinity of the tabernacle dwelt the Levites, the priestly tribe:

“But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle” (Numbers 1:50),

and around the Levites were grouped the twelve tribes, three on either side see Numbers 2. Again; we read, that when Israel’s camp was to be moved from one place to another,

“Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp” (Numbers 2:17).

And, once more,

“And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the Lord, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. And the Lord came down in a cloud and spake unto him” (Numbers 11:24, 25).

How striking is this! The tabernacle was the great gathering center. As such it was a beautiful foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus. He is our great gathering-center. And His precious promise is, that

“where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

7. The “tabernacle” was the place where the Law was preserved. The first two tables of stone, on which Jehovah had inscribed the ten commandments were broken (see Exodus 32:19); but the second set were deposited in the ark in the tabernacle for safe keeping (see Deuteronomy 10:2-5). It was only there, within the holy of holies, the tablets of the Law were preserved intact. How this, again, speaks to us of Christ! He it was that said,

“Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:7, 8).

Throughout His perfect life He preserved in thought, word and deed, the Divine Decalogue, honoring and magnifying God’s Law.

8. The “tabernacle” was the *place where sacrifice was made*. In its outer court stood the brazen altar, to which the animals were brought, and on which they were slain. There it was that blood was shed and atonement was made for sin. So it was with the Lord Jesus. He fulfilled in His own Person the typical significance of the brazen altar, as of every piece of the tabernacle furniture. The body in which He tabernacled on earth was nailed to the cruel Tree. The Cross was the altar upon which God’s Lamb was slain, where His precious blood was shed, and where complete atonement was made for sin.

9. The “tabernacle” was the *place where the priestly family was fed*.

“And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat: with unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it... The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: *in the holy place shall it be eaten*” (Leviticus 6:16, 26).

How deeply significant are these scriptures in their typical import! And how they speak to us of Christ as the Food of God’s priestly family today, that is, all believers (see 1 Peter 2:5). He is the Bread of Life. He is the One upon whom our souls delight to feed.

10. The “tabernacle” was the place of worship. To it the pious Israelite brought his offerings. To it he turned when he desired to worship Jehovah. From its door the Voice of the Lord was heard. Within its courts the priests ministered in their sacred service. And so it was with the Anti-type. It is “by him” we are to offer unto God a sacrifice of praise (see Hebrews 13:15). It is in Him, and by Him, alone, that we can worship the Father. It is through Him we have access to the throne of grace.

Thus we see how fully and how perfectly the tabernacle of old foreshadowed the Person of our blessed Lord, and why the Holy Spirit, when announcing the Incarnation, said, “And the word became flesh, and tabernacled among us.” Before passing on to the next clause of John 1:14, it should be pointed out that there is a series of striking contrasts between the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon’s temple in their respective foreshadowings of Christ.

(1) The tabernacle foreshadowed Christ in His first advent; the temple looks forward to Christ at His second advent.

(2) The tabernacle was first, historically; the temple was not built until long afterwards.

(3) The tabernacle was but a temporary erection; the temple was a permanent structure.

(4) The tabernacle was erected by Moses the prophet (which was the office Christ filled during His first advent); the temple was built by Solomon the king (which is the office Christ will fill at His second advent).

(5) The tabernacle was used in the wilderness — speaking of Christ’s humiliation; the temple was built *in Jerusalem*, the “city of the great King” (Matthew 5:35) — speaking of Christ’s future glorification.

(6) The numeral which figured most prominently in the tabernacle was five, which speaks of grace, and grace was what characterized the earthly ministry of Christ at His first advent; but the leading numeral in the temple was twelve which speaks of government, for Christ shall rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

(7) The tabernacle was unattractive in its externals — so when Christ was here before He was as “a root out of a dry ground;” but the temple was renowned for its outward magnificence — so Christ when He returns shall come in power and great glory.

“And we beheld his glory.” “We beheld” refers, directly, to the first disciples, yet it is the blessed experience of all believers today.

“But we all... beholding, as in a glass (mirror) the glory of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The term used in both of these verses seems to point a contrast. In John 12:41 we read, “These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him,” the reference being to Isaiah 6. The Old Testament celebrities only had occasional and passing glimpses of God’s glory. But, in contrast from these who only “saw,” we — believers of this dispensation — “*behold* his glory.” But more particularly, there is a contrast here between the beholding and the non-beholding of God’s glory: the Shekinah glory abode in the holy of holies, and therefore, was *hidden*. But we, now, “behold” the Divine glory.

“We beheld his glory.” What is meant *by* this? Ah! who is competent to answer. Eternity itself will be too short to exhaustively explore this theme. The glories of our Lord are infinite, for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. No subject ought to be dearer to the heart of a believer. Briefly defined, “We beheld his glory” signifies His supreme excellency, His personal perfections. For the purpose of general classification we may say the “glories” of our Savior are fourfold, each of which is capable of being subdivided indefinitely. First, there are His *essential* “glories,” as the Son of God; these are His Divine perfections, as for example, His Omnipotence. Second, there are His *moral* “glories,” and these are His human perfections, as for example, His meekness. Third, there are His *official* “glories,” and these are His mediatorial perfections, as for example, His priesthood. Fourth, there are His *acquired* “glories,” and these are the reward for what He has done. Probably the first three of these are spoken of in our text.

**First**, “We beheld his glory” refers to His *essential* “glory,” or Divine perfections. This is clear from the words which follow: “The

glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” From the beginning to the end of His earthly life and ministry the Deity of the Lord Jesus was plainly evidenced. His supernatural birth, His personal excellencies, His matchless teaching, His wondrous miracles, His death and resurrection, all proclaimed Him as the Son of God. But it is to be noted that these words, “we beheld his *glory*,” follow immediately after the words “tabernacled” among men. We cannot but believe there is here a further reference to the tabernacle. In the tabernacle, in the holy of holies, Jehovah made His throne upon the mercy seat, and the evidence of His presence there was the *Shekinah glory*, frequently termed “the cloud.” When the tabernacle had been completed, and Jehovah took possession of it, we read,

“then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and *the glory* of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34).

It was the same at the completion of Solomon’s temple:

“The cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:10, 11).

Here “the cloud” and “the glory” are clearly identified. The *Shekinah glory*, then, was the standing sign of God’s presence in the midst of Israel. Hence, after Israel’s apostasy, and when the Lord was turning away from them, we are told,

“And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city” (Ezekiel 11:23).

Therefore, when we read, “The Word... tabernacled among men, and we beheld his glory” it was the proof that none other than Jehovah was again in Israel’s midst. And it is a remarkable fact, to which we have never seen attention called, that at either extremity of the Word’s tabernacling among men the *Shekinah glory* was evidenced. Immediately following His birth we are told,

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, *and the glory of the*

*Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid”*  
(Luke 2:8, 9).

And, at His departure from this world, we read

*“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld,  
he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight”*  
(Acts 1:9)

not “clouds,” but “a cloud! We beheld his glory,” then, refers, first, to His Divine glory.

**Second**, there also seems to be a reference here to His *official* “glory,” which was exhibited upon the Holy Mount. In 2 Peter 1:16 we read, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” The reference is to the Transfiguration, for the next verse goes on to say, “For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is the use of the word “glory” here which seems to link the transfiguration-scene with John 1:14. This is confirmed by the fact that on the Mount, “while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them” (Matthew 17:5).

**Third**, there is also a clear reference in John 1:14 to the moral “glory” or perfections of the God-Man, for after saying “we beheld his glory,” John immediately adds (omitting the parenthesis) “*full of grace and truth.*” What marvelous grace we behold in that wondrous descent from heaven’s throne to Bethlehem’s manger! It had been an act of infinite condescension if the One who was the Object of angelic worship had deigned to come down to this earth and reign over it as King; but that He should appear in weakness, that He should voluntarily choose poverty, that He should become a helpless Babe — such grace is altogether beyond our ken; such matchless love passeth knowledge. O that we may never lose our sense of wonderment at the infinite condescension of God’s Son.

In His marvelous stoop we behold *His glory*. Greatness is never so glorious as when it takes the place of lowliness. Power is never so attractive as when it is placed at the disposal of others. Might is

never so triumphant as when it sets aside its own prerogatives. Sovereignty is never so winsome as when it is seen in the place of service. And, may we not say it reverently, Deity had never appeared so glorious as when It hung upon a maiden's breast! Yes, we behold His glory — the glory of an infinite condescension, the glory of a matchless grace, the glory of a fathomless love.

Concerning the *acquired* "glories" of our Lord we cannot now treat at length. These include the various rewards bestowed upon Him by the Father after the successful completion of the work which had been committed into His hands. It is of these acquired glories Isaiah speaks, when, after treating of the voluntary humiliation and death of the Savior, he gives us to hear the Father saying of Christ,

"Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12).

It is of these acquired glories the Holy Spirit speaks in Philippians 2, where after telling of our Lord's obedience even unto the death of the Cross, He declares,

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

And so we might continue. But how unspeakably blessed to know, that at the close of our great High Priest's prayer, recorded in John 17, we find Him saying, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold *my glory*, which thou hast given me" (verse 24)!

Before we pass on to the next verse we would point out that there is an intimate connection between the one which has just been before us (John 5:14) and the opening verse of the chapter. Verse 14 is really an explanation and amplification of verse 1. There are three statements in each which exactly correspond, and the latter throw light on the former. First, "in the beginning was the word," and that is something that transcends our comprehension; but "and the word became flesh" brings Him within reach of our sense. Second "and the word was with God," and again we are unable to understand; but the Word "tabernacled among us," and we may draw near and

behold. Third, “and the word was God,” and again we are in the realm of the Infinite; but “full of grace and truth,” and here are two essential facts concerning God which come within the range of our vision. Thus by coupling together verses 1 and 14 (reading the verses in between as a parenthesis) we have a statement which is, probably, the most comprehensive in its sweep, the profoundest in its depths, and yet the simplest in its terms to be found between the covers of the Bible. Put these verses side by side: —

- (1) “*In the beginning* was the word:”
- (2) “And the word became flesh” tells of the beginning of His human life.
- (3) “And the word was with God”
- (4) “And tabernacled among us” shows Him with men.
- (5) “And the word *was God*”
- (6) “Full of grace and truth,” and this tells *what God is*.

“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” (John 1:15).

Concerning the ministry and testimony of John the Baptist we shall have more to say in our next chapter, D.V., so upon this verse we offer only two very brief remarks.

**First**, we find that here the Lord’s forerunner bears witness to Christ’s supreme excellency: “He that cometh after me is preferred before me,” he declares, which, in the Greek, signifies Christ had His *being* “before” John.

**Second**, “For he *was* before me.” But, historically, John the Baptist was born into this world six months before the Savior was. When, then, the Baptist says Christ “*was before*” him, he is referring to His eternal existence, and, therefore, bears witness to His deity.

“And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).

The word “fulness” is still another term in this important passage which brings out the absolute Deity of the Savior. It is the same word which is found in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 — “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;... For in him dwelleth all the *fulness* of the Godhead bodily.” The Greek preposition “ek” signifies “out of.” Out of the Divine fulness have all we (believers) “received.” What is it we have “received” from Christ? Ah, what is it we have not “received!” It is out of His inexhaustible “fulness” we have “received.” From Him we have “received” life (see John 10:28); peace (John 14:27); joy (John 15:11); God’s own Word (John 17:14); the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). There is laid up in Christ, as in a great storehouse, *all* that the believer needs both for time and for eternity.

“And grace for grace.” Bishop Ryle tells us the Greek preposition here may be translated two different ways, and suggests the following thoughts. First, we have received “grace *upon* grace,” that is, God’s favors heaped up, one upon another. Second, “grace *for* grace,” that is, new grace to supply old grace; grace sufficient to meet every recurring need.

[“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” \(John 1:17\).](#)

A contrast is drawn between what was “given” by Moses, and what “came” by Jesus Christ; for “grace and truth” were not merely “given,” they “*came* by Jesus Christ,” came in all their fulness, came in their glorious perfections. The Law was “given” to Moses, for it was not his own; but “grace and truth” were not “given” to Christ, for these were His own essential perfections. On looking into this contrast we must bear in mind that the great point here is the manifestation of God: God as He was manifested through the Law, and God as He was made known by the Only Begotten Son.

Was not the Law “truth?” Yes, so far as it went. It announced what God righteously demanded of men, and therefore, what men ought to be according to God’s mind. It has often been said, the Law is a transcript of God’s mind. But how inadequate such a statement is! Did the Law reveal what God is? Did it display all His attributes? If it did, there would be nothing more to learn of God than what the Law made known.

Did the Law tell out the grace of God? No; indeed. The Law was holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good. It demanded obedience; it required the strictest doing and continuance of all things written in it. And the only alternative was death. Inflexible in its claims, it remitted no part of its penalty. He that despised it “died *without mercy*,” and,

“every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward” (Hebrews 10:28; see Hebrews 2:2).

Such a Law could never justify a sinner. For this it was never given.

The inevitable effect of the Law when received by the unsaved is just that which was produced at Sinai, to whom it first came:

“And they said unto Moses, Speak *thou* with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19).

“Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die” (Deuteronomy 5:25).

Why such terror? Because

“they could not endure that which was commanded” (Hebrews 12:20).

This terror was the testimony which the Law extorts from every sinner, to whom it is brought home as God’s Law; it is

“the ministration of condemnation, and of death” (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9).

It has a “glory,” indeed, but it is the glory of thunder and lightning, of fire, of blackness, and of darkness, and the sound of the trumpet, and of the voice of words, which only bring terror to the guilty conscience. But, blessed be God, there is “a glory that excelleth” (2 Corinthians 3:10).

“*Grace and truth* came by Jesus Christ.” The “glory that excelleth” is the glory of “the word that became flesh, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.” The Law revealed

God's justice, but it did not make known His mercy; it testified to His righteousness, but it did not exhibit His grace. It *was* God's "truth," but not the full truth about God Himself. "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" we never read "by the law is the knowledge of God." No; the "law entered that the offense might abound," "sin by the commandment became exceeding sinful." It made known the heinousness of sin; it condemned the sinner, but it did not fully reveal God. It exhibited His righteous hatred of sin and His holy determination to punish it: it exposed the guilt and corruption of the sinner, but for ought it could tell him, it left him to his doom.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:3, 4).

"Grace *and* truth." These are fitly and inseparably joined together. We cannot have the one without having the other. There are many who do not like salvation by grace, and there are those who would tolerate grace if they could have it without the truth. The Nazarenes could "wonder" at the *gracious* words which proceeded out of His mouth, but as soon as Christ pressed the truth upon them, they "were filled with wrath," and sought to

"cast him down headlong from the brow of the hill whereon their city was built" (Luke 4:29).

Such, too, was the condition of those who sought Him for "the meat that perisheth." They were willing to profit from His grace, but when He told them the *truth* some "murmured" at Him, others were "offended," and "many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). And in our own day, there are many who admire the grace which came by Jesus Christ, and would consent to be saved by it, provided this could be without the intrusion of the truth. But this cannot be. Those who reject the truth, reject grace.

There is, in Romans 5:21, another sentence which is closely parallel, and really, an amplification of these words "grace and truth" — "Grace reigns *through righteousness*, unto eternal life by Jesus

Christ our Lord.” The grace which saves sinners is no mere moral weakness such as is often to be found in human government. Nor is “the righteousness of God,” through which grace reigns, some mere semblance of justice. No; on the Cross Christ was “set forth a propitiation (a perfect satisfaction to the broken Law) through faith in his blood, to declare his (God’s) righteousness for the remission of sins” (Romans 3:25). Grace does not ignore the Law, or set aside its requirements; nay verily, “it establishes the law” (Romans 3:31): establishes it because inseparably linked with “truth;” establishes it because it reigns “through righteousness,” not at the expense of it; establishes it because grace tells of a Substitute who kept the Law for and endured the death penalty on behalf of all who receive Him as their Lord and Savior; and establishes it by bringing the redeemed to “delight” in the Law.

But was there *no* “grace and truth” before Jesus Christ came? Assuredly there was. God dealt according to “grace and truth” with our first parents immediately after their transgression — it was grace that sought them, and provided them with a covering; as it was truth that pronounced sentence upon them, and expelled them from the garden. God dealt according to “grace and truth” with Israel on the passover night in Egypt: it was grace that provided shelter for them beneath the blood; it was truth that righteously demanded the death of an innocent substitute in their stead. But “grace and truth” were never fully revealed till the Savior Himself appeared. By Him they “came:” in Him they were personified, magnified, glorified.

And now let us notice a few contrasts between Law and Grace:

1. Law addresses men as members of the old creation; Grace makes men members of a new creation.
2. Law manifested what was in Man-sin; Grace manifests what is in God-Love.
3. Law demanded righteousness from men; Grace brings righteousness to men.
4. Law sentences a living man to death; Grace brings a dead man to life.

5. Law speaks of what men must do for God; Grace tells of what Christ has done for men.
6. Law gives a knowledge of sin; Grace puts away sin.
7. Law brought God out to men; Grace brings men in to God.

[“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” \(John 1:18\).](#)

This verse terminates the Introduction to John’s Gospel, and summarizes the whole of the first eighteen verses of John 1. Christ has “declared” — told out, revealed, unveiled, displayed the Father; and the One who has done this is “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.” The “bosom of the Father” speaks of proximity to, personal intimacy with, and the enjoyment of the Father’s love. And, in becoming flesh, the Son did not leave this place of inseparable union. It is not the “Son which was,” but “which is in the bosom of the Father.” He retained the same intimacy with the Father, entirely unimpaired by the Incarnation. Nothing in the slightest degree detracted from His own personal glory, or from the nearness and oneness to the Father which He had enjoyed with Him from all eternity. How we ought, then, to honor, reverence, and worship the Lord Jesus!

But a further word on this verse is called for. A remarkable contrast is pointed. In the past, God, in the fulness of His glory, was unmanifested — “No man” had seen Him; but now, God is fully revealed — the Son has “declared” Him. Perhaps this contrast may be made clearer to our readers if we refer to two passages in the Old Testament and compare them with two passages in the New Testament.

In 1 Kings 8:12 we read,

[“Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell \*in the thick darkness.\*”](#)

Again, “*Clouds and darkness* are round about him” (Psalm 97:2). These verses tell not what God is in Himself, but declare that under

the Law He was not revealed. What could be known of a person who dwelt in “thick darkness!” But now turn to 1 Peter 2:9,

“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*.”

Ah, how blessed this is. Again, we read in 1 John 1:5, 7,

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all... but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

And this, because the Father has been fully “declared” by our adorable Savior.

Once more: turn to Exodus 33:18 — “And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory.” This was the earnest request of Moses. But was it granted? Read on, “And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of a rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hind, and thou shalt see my back parts: *but my face shall not be seen*.” Character is not declared in a person’s “back parts” but in his face! That Moses saw not the face, but only the back parts of Jehovah, was in perfect accord with the dispensation of Law in which he lived. How profoundly thankful should we be that the dispensation of Law has passed, and that we live in the full light of the dispensation of Grace! How deeply grateful should we be, that we look not on the back parts of Jehovah

“for 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” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

May grace be given us to magnify and adorn that superlative grace which has brought us out of darkness into marvelous light, because the God whom no man hath seen at any time has been fully “declared” by the Son.

We conclude, once more, by drawing up a number of questions on the passage which will be before us in the next chapter (John 1:19-34), so that the interested reader, who desires to “Search the Scriptures” may give them careful study in the interval.

1. Why did the Jews ask John if he were Elijah, John 1:21?
2. What “prophet” did they refer to in John 1:21?
3. What are the thoughts suggested by “voice” in John 1:23?
4. Why did John cry “in the wilderness” rather than in the temple, John 1:23?
5. “Whom ye know not,” John 1:26 — What did this prove?
6. What are the thoughts suggested by the Savior’s title “The Lamb of God,” John 1:29?
7. Why did the Holy Spirit descend on Christ as a “dove,” John 1:32?

# JOHN 1:19-34

## CHRIST'S FORERUNNER

Following our usual custom, we begin by submitting an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us. In it we have: —

1. The Jews' inquiry of John, and his answers, John 1:19-26,
  - 1) "Who art thou?" Not the Christ: 19, 20.
  - 2) "Art thou Elijah?" No: 21.
  - 3) "Art thou that prophet?" No: 21.
  - 4) "What sayest thou of thyself?" A "voice:" 22, 23.
  - 5) "Why baptizeth thou?" To prepare the way for Christ: 24-26.
2. John's witness concerning Christ: John 1:27.
3. Location of the Conference, John 1:28.
4. John proclaims Christ as God's "Lamb," John 1:29.
5. The purpose of John's baptism, John 1:30-31.
6. John tells of the Spirit descending on Christ at His baptism, and foretells that Christ shall baptize with the Spirit, John 1:32, 33.
7. John owns Christ's Deity, John 1:34.

Even a hurried reading of these verses will make it evident that the personage which stands out most conspicuously in them is John the Baptist. Moreover, we do not have to study this passage very closely to discover that, the person and the witness of the Lord's forerunner are brought before us here in a manner entirely different from what we find in the first three Gospels. No hint is given that his raiment was "of camel's hair," that he had "a leathern girdle about his loins," or that "his meat was locusts and wild honey." Nothing is recorded of his stem Call to Repentance, nor is anything said of his announcement that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These things were foreign to the design of the Holy Spirit in this fourth Gospel. Again; instead of referring to the Lord Jesus as the One "whose fan is in his hand," and of the One who

"will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12),

he points to Him as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” And this is most significant and blessed to those who have been divinely taught to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Without doubt John the Baptist is, in several respects, one of the most remarkable characters that is brought before us in the Bible. He was the subject of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 40); his birth was due to the direct and miraculous intervention of God (Luke 1:7, 13); he was “filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15); he was a man sent from God” (John 1:6); he was sent to prepare the way of the Lord (Matthew 3:3). Of him the Lord said,

“Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11);

the reference being to his *positional* “greatness,” as the forerunner of the Messiah: to him was accorded the high honor of baptizing the Lord Jesus. That Christ was referring to the positional “greatness” of John is clear from His next words, “notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” To have a place in the kingdom of heaven will be a more exalted position than to be heralding the King outside of it, as John was. This, we take it is the key to that word in John 14:28, where we find the Lord Jesus saying, “My Father is *greater* than I” — greater not in His person, but in His position; for, at the time the Savior uttered those words He was in the place of subjection, as God’s “Servant.”

Our passage opens by telling of a deputation of priests and Levites being sent from Jerusalem to enquire of John as to who he was:

“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?” (John 1:19).

Nothing like this is found in the other Gospels, but it is in striking accord with the character and scope of the fourth Gospel, which deals with spiritual rather than dispensational relationships. The incident before us brings out the spiritual *ignorance* of the religious leaders among the Jews. In fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord’s forerunner had appeared in the wilderness, but, lacking in spiritual discernment, the leaders in Jerusalem knew not who he

was. Accordingly, their messengers came and enquired of John, “Who art thou?” Multitudes of people were flocking to this strange preacher in the wilderness, and many had been baptized by him. A great stir had been made, so much so that “men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15), and the religious leaders in Jerusalem were compelled to take note of it; therefore, did they send a deputation to wait upon John, to find out who he really was, and to enquire into his credentials.

“And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ” (John 1:20).

These words give plain intimation of the Spirit in which the priests and Levites must have approached John, as also of the design of “the Jews” who had sent them. To them the Baptist was an interloper. He was outside the religious systems of that day. He had not been trained in the schools of the Rabbins, he had held no position of honor in the temple ministrations, and he was not identified with either the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Herodians. From whence then had he received his authority? Who had commissioned him to go forth bidding men to “Repent.” By what right did he baptize people? One can imagine the tone in which they said to John, “Who art *thou*?” No doubt they expected to intimidate him. This seems clear from the fact that we are here told, “and he confessed, and *denied* not.” He boldly stood his ground. Neither the dignity of those who had sent this embassy to John, nor their threatening frowns, moved him at all. “He confessed, and denied not.” May like courage be found in us when we are challenged with an “Who art thou?”

“But confessed, I am not the Christ.” Having taken the firm stand he had, did Satan now tempt him to go to the other extreme? Failing to intimidate him, did the enemy now seek to make him boastfully exaggerate? Christ had not then been openly manifested: John was the one before the public eye, as we read in Mark 1:5,

“And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan” (Mark 1:5).

Now that the multitudes were flocking to him, and many had become his disciples (cf. John 1:35), why not announce that he was

the Messiah himself! But he instantly banished such wicked and presumptuous thoughts, if such were presented by Satan to his mind, as most likely they were, or, why tell us that he “confessed I am not the Christ?” May God deliver us from the evil spirit of boasting, and keep us from ever claiming to be anything more than what we really are — sinners saved by grace.

“And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not” (John 1:21).

Why should they have asked John if he were Elijah? The answer is, Because there was a general expectation among the Jews at that time that Elijah would again appear on earth. That this was so, is dear from a number of passages in the Gospels. For instance, when the Lord asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” they answered, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist (who had been slain in the interval), some *Elijah*, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:13, 14). Again; as the Lord Jesus and His disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He said unto them, “Tell the vision to no man until the Son of man be raised from the dead.” Then, we read,

“His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?” (Matthew 17:9, 10).

The expectation of the Jews had a scriptural foundation, for the last verses of the Old Testament say,

“Behold, I will send you *Elijah the prophet* before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5, 6).

This prophecy has reference to the return to earth of Elijah, to perform a ministry just before the second advent of Christ, similar in character to that of John the Baptist before the first public appearing of Christ.

When asked, “Art thou Elijah?” John replied, emphatically, “I am not.” John had much in common with the Tishbite, and his work was very similar in character to the yet future work of Elijah;

nevertheless, he was not Elijah himself. He went before Christ “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), because he came “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Next, John’s interrogators asked him, “Art thou that prophet?” (John 1:21). *What* “prophet?” we may well enquire. And the answer is, The “prophet” predicted through Moses. The prediction is recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18:

“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... I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”

This was one of the many Messianic prophecies given in the Old Testament times, which received its fulfillment in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Art thou that prophet?” John was asked; and, again, he answered, “No.”

“Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?” (John 1:22).

Searching questions were these — “*Who* art thou?”; “what sayest thou of *thyself*?” John might have answered, and answered truthfully, “I am the son of Zacharias the priest. I am one who has been filled with the Holy Spirit from my birth.” Or, he might have replied, “I am the most remarkable character ever raised up by God and sent unto Israel.” “What sayest thou of thyself?” Ah! that was indeed a searching question, and both writer and reader may well learn a lesson from John’s reply, and seek grace to emulate his lovely modesty — a lesson much needed in these days of Laodicean boasting.

“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah” (John 1:23).

Here was John’s answer. “What sayest thou of thyself?” “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” he said. Becoming humility

was this. Humility is of great price in the sight of God, and has had a prominent place in the men whom He has used. Paul, the greatest of the apostles, confessed himself “less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8). And John here confesses much the same thing, when he referred to himself as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” Reader, what reply would you make to such a query — “What sayest thou of *thyself*?” Surely you would not answer, “I am an eminent saint of God: I am living on a very exalted plane of spirituality: I am one who has been much used of God.” Such self-exaltation would show you had learned little from Him who was “meek and lowly in heart,” and would evidence a spirit far from that which should cause us to own that, after all, we are only “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10).

When John referred to himself as “the voice,” he employed the very term which the Holy Spirit had used of him seven hundred years previously, when speaking through Isaiah the prophet —

[“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” \(Isaiah 40:3\).](#)

And we cannot but believe this appellation was selected with Divine discrimination. In a former chapter, when commenting upon the titles of the Lord Jesus, found in John 1:7 — “The light” — we called attention to the fact that Christ referred to His forerunner (in evident contrast from Himself as “the light”) as “the *lamp* that burneth and shineth” (John 5:35, R.V.). And so here, we are satisfied that another contrast is pointed. Christ is “the Word;” John was but “the voice.” What, then, are the thoughts suggested by this figurative title?

In the first place, the word exists (in the mind) before the voice articulates it. Such was the relation between Christ and His forerunner. It is true that John was the first to appear before the public eye; yet, as the “Word,” Christ had existed from all eternity. Second, the voice is simply the vehicle or medium by which the word is expressed or *made* known. Such was John. The object of his mission and the purpose of his ministry was to bear witness to “the Word.” Again, the voice is simply heard but not seen. John was not seeking to display himself. His work was to get men to listen to his

God-given message in order that they might *behold* “the Lamb.” May the Lord today make more of His servants John-like; just “voices,” *heard but not seen!* Finally, we may add, that the word endures after the voice is silent. The voice of John has long since been stilled by death, but “the Word” abideth forever. Appropriately, then, was the one who introduced the Messiah to Israel, termed the “voice.” What wonderful depths there are in the Scriptures! How much is contained in a single word! And how this calls for prolonged *meditation* and humble prayer!

“The voice of one crying *in the wilderness.*” What a position for the Messiah’s forerunner to occupy! Surely his place was in Jerusalem. Why then did not John cry in the temple? Why, because Jehovah was no more there in the temple. Judaism was but a hollow shell: outward form there was, but no life within. It was to a nation of legalists, Pharisee ridden, who neither manifested Abraham’s faith nor produced his works, that John came. God would not own the self-righteous formalism of the Jews. Therefore, the one “sent of God” appeared outside the religious systems and circles of that day. But why did John preach “*in the wilderness?*” Because the “wilderness” symbolized the spiritual *barrenness* of the Jewish nation. John could only mourn over that which was not of God, and everything about him was in keeping with this: his food was that which he found in the wilderness, and his prophet’s garment testified to the failure that was evident on every hand.

“And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?” (John 1:24, 25).

This final question put to John by the embassy from Jerusalem confirms what we have said upon verse 20. The religious leaders among the Jews were disputing John’s right to preach, and challenging his authority to baptize. He had received no commission from the Sanhedrin, hence “why baptizest thou?” John does not appear to have answered the last question directly, instead, he turns to them and speaks of Christ.

“John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not” (John 1:26).

John continued to stand his ground: he would not deny that he baptized with water, or more correctly, *in* water, but he sought to get them occupied with something of greater importance than a symbolical rite. There is much to be learned from John's answer here. These men were raising questions about baptism, while as yet they were utter strangers to Christ Himself — how like many today! Of what use was it to discuss with these Pharisee — commissioned “priests and Levites” the “*why*” of baptism, when they were yet in their sins? Well would it be for the Lord's servants and those engaged in personal work for Christ, to carefully heed what is before us here. People are willing to argue about side issues, while the vital and central Issue remains undecided! And only too often the Christian worker follows them into “By-path meadow.” What is needed is for us to ignore all irrelevant quibbles, and press upon the lost the claims of Christ and their *need* of accepting Him as their Lord and Savior.

“There standeth one among you, whom ye *know not*.” How this exposed Israel's fi condition! How this revealed their spiritual ignorance! And how tragically true, in principle, is this today. Even in this so-called Christian land, while many have heard about Christ, yet in how many circles, yes, and in religious circles too, we may say, “there standeth one among you, whom ye know not!” O the spiritual blindness of the natural man. Christ, by His Spirit, stands in the midst of many a congregation, unseen and unknown.

“He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:27).

What a noble testimony was this! How these words of John bring out the Divine glory of the One he heralded! Remember *who* he was. No ordinary man was John the Baptist. The subject of Old Testament prophecy, the son of a priest, born as the result of the direct intervention of God's power, filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, engaged in a ministry which drew great multitudes unto him, and yet he looked up to Christ as standing on a plane infinitely higher than the one he occupied, as a Being from another world, as One before whom he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose His shoes. He could find no expression strong enough to define the difference which separated him from the One

who was “preferred before” him. Again we say, How these words of John bring out the Divine glory of the One he heralded!

“These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing” (John 1:28).

There is, of course, some good reason *why* the Holy Spirit has been pleased to tell us *where* this conference took place, whether we are able to discover it or not. Doubtless, the key to its significance is found in the meaning of the proper nouns here recorded. Unfortunately, there is some variation in the spelling of “Bethabara” in the Greek manuscripts; but with Gesenius, the renowned Hebrew scholar, we are firmly inclined to believe this place is identical with “Bethbarah” mentioned in Judges 7:24, and which signifies “House of Passage,” which was so named to memorialize the crossing of the Jordan in the days of Joshua. It was here, then, (apparently) at a place whose name signified “house of passage,” beyond Jordan, the symbol of *death*, that John was baptizing as the forerunner of Christ. The meaning of this should not be hard to find. The significance of these names correspond closely with the religious position that John himself occupied, and with the character of his mission. *Separated* as he was from Judaism, those who responded to his call to repent, and were baptized of him confessing their sins, *passed out* of the apostate Jewish system, and took their place with the little remnant who were “prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). Well, then, was the place where John was baptizing named “Bethbarah” — House of Passage.

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“Behold the lamb of God:” the *connection* in which these words are found should be carefully noted. It was the day following the meeting between John and the Jerusalem delegation, a meeting which evidently occurred in the presence of others also, for John continues “this is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me,” which is a word for word reference to what he had said to those who had interrogated him on the previous day — see verse 27; when he had also declared to those priests and

Levites “which were sent of the Pharisees” (verse 24), “there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.”

“Behold the lamb of God.” The force of this Call was deeply significant when viewed in the light of its setting. The Pharisees were looking for a “prophet,” and they desired a “king” who should deliver them from the Roman yoke, but they had no yearnings for a *Savior-priest*. The questions asked of John betrayed the hearts of those who put them. They appeared to be in doubt as to whether or not the Baptist was the long promised Messiah, so they asked him, “Art thou *Elijah*? Art thou that prophet?” But, be it noted, no enquiry was made as to whether he was the one who should deliver them “from the wrath to come!” One would have naturally expected these priests and Levites to have asked about the *sacrifice*, but no; apparently they had no sense of sin! It was under these circumstances that the forerunner of Christ announced Him as “the *lamb* of God,” not as “the word of God,” not as “the Christ of God,” but as *THE LAMB*. It was the Spirit of God presenting the Lord Jesus to Israel in the very office and character in which they stood in deepest need of Him. They would have welcomed Him on the *throne*, but they must first accept Him on the *altar*. And is it any different today? Christ as an Elijah — a Social Reformer — will be tolerated; and Christ as a Prophet, as a Teacher of ethics, will receive respect. But what the world needs first and foremost is the Christ of the Cross, where the Lamb of God offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin.

“Behold *the lamb* of God.” There before John stood the One whom all the sacrifices of Old Testament times had foreshadowed. It is exceedingly striking to observe the progressive order followed by God in the teaching of Scripture concerning “the lamb.”

**First**, in Genesis 4, we have the Lamb *typified* in the firstlings of the flock slain by Abel in sacrifice.

**Second**, we have the Lamb prophesied in Genesis 22:8 where Abraham said to Isaac, “God will provide himself a lamb.”

**Third**, in Exodus 12, we have the Lamb slain and its blood *applied*.

**Fourth**, in Isaiah 53:7, we have the Lamb *personified*: here for the first time we learn that the Lamb would be a Man.

**Fifth**, in John 1:29, we have the Lamb *identified*, learning who He was.

**Sixth**, in Revelation 5, we have the Lamb *magnified* by the hosts of heaven.

**Seventh**, in the last chapter of the Bible we have the Lamb *glorified*, seated upon the eternal throne of God, Revelation 22:1.

Once more; mark the orderly development in the scope of the sacrifices. In Genesis 4 sacrifice is offered for the *individual* — Abel. In Exodus 12 the sacrifice avails for the whole *household*. In Leviticus 16, on the annual Day of Atonement, the sacrifice was efficacious for the entire nation. But here in John 1:29 it is “Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the *sin of the world*” — Gentiles are embraced as well as Jews!

“Behold the *lamb of God*.” What are the thoughts suggested by this title? It points to His moral perfections, His *sinlessness*, for He was the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). It tells of His gentleness, His voluntary offering Himself to God on our behalf — He was “led” (not driven) as “a lamb to the slaughter” (Acts 8:32, R.V.). But, more especially, and particularly, this title of our Lord speaks of sacrifice.

He was “the lamb of God which *taketh away the sin* of the world,” and this could only be through death, for “without shedding of blood is no remission.” There was only one way by which sin could be taken away, and that was by death. “Sin” here signifies guilt (condemnation) as in Hebrews 9:26; and “the world” refers to the world of believers, for it is only those who are in Christ for whom there is now “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1); it is the world of believers, as contrasted from “the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5).

“This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me. And I knew him

not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water” (John 1:30, 31).

Here for the third time John declares that Christ was “preferred before him” — (see verses 15, 27, 30). It affirmed His pre-existence: it was a witness to His eternity. Then John tells of the purpose of his baptism. It was to make Christ “manifest” to Israel. It was to prepare a people for Him. This people was prepared by them taking the place of sinners before God (Mark 1:5), and that is why John baptized in Jordan, the river of death; for, being baptized in Jordan, they acknowledged that *death was their due*. In this, John’s baptism differs from Christian baptism. In Christian baptism the believer does not confess that death is his due, but he shows forth the fact that he has already died, died to sin, died with Christ (Romans 6:3, 4).

“And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him” (John 1:32).

This has reference, of course, to the occasion when Christ Himself was baptized of John in the Jordan, when the Father testified to His pleasure, in the Son, and when the Spirit descended upon Him as a dove. It manifested the *character* of the One on whom He came. The “dove” is the bird of love and sorrow: apt symbol, then, of Christ. The love expressed the sorrow, and the sorrow told out the depths of His love. Thus did the heavenly Dove bear witness to Christ. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, we read

“there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:3).

“Fire,” uniformly signifies Divine *judgment*. There was that in the disciples which needed to be judged — the evil nature still remained within them. But, there was nothing in the Holy One of God that needed judging; hence, did the Holy Spirit descend upon *Him* like a dove!

“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 Spirit” (John 1:33).

The word “remaining” is rendered “abiding” in the R.V., and this is one of the characteristic words of the fourth Gospel. The other three Gospels all make mention of the Lord Jesus being anointed by the Holy Spirit, but John is the only one that says the Spirit “abode” upon Him. The Holy Spirit did not come upon Him, and then leave again, as with the prophets of old – He “abode” on Christ. This term has to do with the *Divine* side of things, and speaks of fellowship. We have the same word again in John 14:10,

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say unto you, I speak not from myself, but the Father abiding in me doeth his works” (R.V.).

So, in John 15, where the Lord Jesus speaks of the fundamental requirement in spiritual fruit-bearing — fellowship with Himself — He says, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit” (John 15:5 R.V.). That Christ shall “baptize with (or ‘in’) the Holy Spirit” was another proof of His Godhood.

“And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

Here the witness of John the Baptist to the person of Christ terminates. It is to be noted that the forerunner bore a seven-fold witness to the excellency of the One he heralded.

**First**, he testified to His *pre-existence* — “He was before me,” verse 15.

**Second**, He testified to His Lordship, verse 23.

**Third**, he testified to His *immeasurable superiority* — “I am not worthy to unloose” His “shoe’s latchet,” verse 27.

**Fourth**, he testified to His sacrificial work — “Behold the lamb,” verse 29.

**Fifth**, he testified to His moral perfections — “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him,” verse 32.

**Sixth**, he testified to His Divine right to baptize with the Holy Spirit, verse 33.

**Seventh**, he testified to His Divine Sonship, verse 34.

The questions below concern the passage which we shall expound in the next chapter, namely, John 1:35-51, and to prepare our readers for it we ask them to give these questions their prayerful and careful study: —

1. Why did Christ ask the two disciples of John, “What seek ye?” John 1:38.
2. What is signified by their reply, “Where dwellest thou?” John 1:38.
3. What important practical truth is incorporated in John 1:40, 41?
4. What blessed truth is illustrated by “findeth” in John 1:43?
5. What is meant by, “in whom is no guile?” John 1:47.
6. What attribute of Christ does John 1:48 demonstrate?
7. To what does Christ refer in John 1:51?

# JOHN 1:35-51

## CHRIST AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

We first submit a brief Analysis of the passage which is to be before us. We would divide it as follows: —

1. John points to Christ as God's Lamb, John 1:35, 36.
2. The effect of this on two of his disciples, John 1:37.
3. Christ's searching question, the disciples' reply and communion with Christ, John 1:38, 39.
4. The effect of this on Andrew, John 1:40-42.
5. Christ finds and calls on Philip to follow Him, John 1:43, 44.
6. The effect of this on Philip, John 1:45, 46.
7. The meeting between Christ and Nathanael, John 1:47-51.

The central truth of the passage we are about to study is, How the first of Christ's disciples were brought into saving contact with Him. It may be that some of our readers have experienced a difficulty when studying these closing verses of John 1 as they have compared their contents with what is found in Mark 1:16-20:

“Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him” (cf. Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11).

Many have wondered how to harmonize John 1:35-42 with Mark 1:16-20. But there is nothing to harmonize, because there is *no* contradiction between them. The truth is, that Mark and John are not writing on the same subject. Mark treats of something which happened at a later date than that of which John writes. John tells us of the conversion of these disciples, whereas Mark (as also Matthew and Luke) deals with their *call to service* — a service which

concerned the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That John omits the call to service (which each of the other three evangelists record) brings out, again, the special character of his Gospel, for he treats not of dispensational but of *spiritual* relationships, and therefore was it reserved for him to describe the *conversion* of these first disciples of Christ.

It is deeply interesting and instructive to mark attentively the manner in which these first disciples found the Savior. They did not all come to Him in the same way, for God does not confine Himself to any particular method — He is sovereign in this, as in everything. It had been well if this had been kept in mind, for then had many a doubt been dispelled and many an heartache removed. How many there are who have listened to the testimony of some striking conversion, and have reproached themselves and made themselves miserable because their experience was a different one. How many churches there are which have their annual two weeks “protracted” meetings, and then conduct themselves as though there were no other souls that needed salvation during the remaining fifty weeks of the year! How many there are who imagine no sinner can be saved except at a “mourner’s bench!” But all of these are so many ways of *limiting* God, that is, holding limited conceptions of God.

Of the four cases of conversion described in our passage (we say four, for the two mentioned in verse 35 are linked together) no two were alike! The first two heard a preacher proclaiming Christ as “the lamb of God,” and, in consequence, promptly sought out the Savior for themselves. Simon Peter, the next one, was “brought” to Christ by his brother, who had followed and found the Savior on the previous day. Philip, the third one, seemed to have no believer to help him, perhaps no fellow creature who cared for his soul; and of him we read,

“Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and *findeth* Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me” (John 1:43).

While the last, Nathanael, was sought out by his now converted brother Philip, and was warmly invited to come and see Christ for himself; and while making for Him, the Savior, apparently, advanced toward and met the seeking one. Putting the four together we may observe that the first found Christ as the result of a

preacher's message. The second and fourth found Christ as the result of the *personal work* of a believer. In the case of the third there was no human instrument employed by God. The fact that the first came to Christ as the result of the ministry of John the Baptist, seems to show that God puts the *preaching* of the Word as of first importance in the saving of sinners. The fact that God honored the personal efforts of two of these early converts, shows He is pleased to give a prominent place to personal work in His means of saving souls. The fact that Philip was saved apart from all human instrumentality, should teach us that God has not reached the end of His resources even though preachers should prove unfaithful to their calling, and even though individual believers are too apathetic to go forth bidding sinners to come to Christ.

It is also to be noted that not only did these first converts find the Savior in a variety of ways, but also that Christ Himself dealt differently with each one. For the two mentioned in verse 35 there was a searching question to test their motives in following Christ — “What seek ye?” For Simon Peter there was a striking declaration to convince him that Christ knew all about him, followed by a gracious promise to reassure his heart. For Philip there was nothing but a peremptory command — “Follow me. While for Nathanael there was a gracious word to disarm him of all prejudice and to assure his heart that the Savior stood ready to receive him. Thus did the Great Physician deal with each man according to his individual peculiarities and needs.

Finally, observe how this passage brings out the suitability of Christ for all kinds of men. It is blessed to behold here, how the Savior drew to Himself men of such widely different types and temperaments. There are some superficial sceptics who sneeringly declare that Christianity only attracts those or a particular type — the effeminate, the emotional, and the intellectually feeble. But such an objection is easily refuted by the facts of common observation. Christ has been worshipped and served by men and women of every variety of temperament and calling. Those who have delighted to own His name as The Name “which is above every name” have been drawn from every walk of life, as well as from every nation and tribe under the sun. Kings and queens, statesmen and soldiers, scientists and philosophers, poets and musicians, lawyers and

physicians, farmers and fishermen have been among the number who have cried, “Worthy is the lamb.” And in the cases of these early converts we find this principle strikingly illustrated.

The unnamed disciple of verse 35 is, by common consent, regarded as John, the writer of this fourth Gospel. John was the disciple who leaned on the Master’s bosom, devoted and affectionate. He was “the disciple whom Jesus loved:” he was, apparently, the only one of the twelve who stood by the Cross as the Savior was dying. Andrew seems to have been a man with a calculating mind, what would be termed today, of a practical turn: no sooner had he come to Christ, than he goes at once and finds his brother Simon, tells him the good news that they had found the Messiah, and brought him to Jesus; and, he was the one to observe the lad with the five barley loaves and two small fishes, when the hungry multitude was to be fed (John 6:8, 9). Simon Peter was hot-headed, impulsive, full of zeal. Philip was sceptical and materialistic: he was the one to whom our Lord put the test question, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” to which Philip replied,

“Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a *little*” (John 6:5, 7);

and again, Philip was the one who said to Christ, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8). Nathanael, of whom least is known, was, evidently of a meditative and retiring disposition, whose life was lived in the back-ground, but of an open and frank nature, one “in who was no guile.” How radically different, then, were these men in type and temperament, yet each of them found in Christ that which met his need and satisfied his heart! We regard these first converts as representative and illustrative cases, so that it behooves us to study each separately and in detail.

“Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples” (John 1:35).

This is the place to ask the question, *What* was the fruitage of John’s mission? What results accrued from his ministry? They were very similar to what may be expected to attend the labors of a servant of God, who is used of His Master, today. John had borne faithful witness to Christ: how had his ministry been received.’, In the first

place, the religious leaders of his day rejected the testimony of God (Luke 7:30). In the second place, great crowds were attracted, and men of all sorts attended upon his ministry (Luke 3:7-15). In the third place, only a few were *really* affected by his message, and stood ready to receive the Messiah when He appeared. It has been much the same all through the ages. When God sends forth a man to take an active and prominent part in His service, the religious leaders look upon him with suspicion, and hold aloof in their fancied superiority. On the other hand, the vulgar, curious crowds, ever hungering for the novel and sensational, are attracted; but comparatively few are really touched in their consciences and hearts.

“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 1:35, 36).

Once more the Lord’s forerunner heralds Him as “the lamb of God” (cf. John 5:29). This teaches us that there are times when the servant of God needs to repeat the same message. It also informs us that the central and vital truth which God’s messenger must press, unceasingly, is the sacrificial work of Christ. Never forget, brother preacher, that your chief concern is to present your Master as “*the lamb of God!*” Notice, also, we are told, “John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, *Behold* the lamb of God.” The words we have placed in italics call attention to a most important moral principle: if we would “look upon Jesus,” if we would “Behold the lamb,” we must stand still; that is, all fleshly activity must cease; we must come to the end of ourselves. This was the first truth which God taught Israel after they had been delivered from Egypt: as they were being pursued by the Egyptians, and came to the Red Sea, God’s servant cried,

“Fear ye not, *stand* still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exodus 14:13).

“And the two disciples heard him speak” (John 1:37). These two men were John and Andrew. By calling they were fishermen. I hey had already attached themselves to John, and had not only been baptized but were eagerly awaiting the promised Messiah and Savior. At last the day arrived when their teacher, whom they trusted as God’s prophet, suddenly checked them in their walk, and no

doubt with almost breathless interest, laid his hand upon them, and pointing to a passing Figure, cried, "Behold the lamb of God!" There, in actual bodily form, was the One for whom the ages had waited. There, within reach of their own eyes, was the Son of God, who was to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. There, right before them, was He of whom one of these very two men later wrote,

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of Life" (1 John 1:1).

How often this experience has been duplicated — duplicated *in principle*, we mean. How many of us used to hear Christ spoken of while as yet we had no personal knowledge of Him! We sat under a preacher who magnified His excellencies, we heard men and women singing "Thou O Christ art all I want, more than all in Thee I find," and we were impressed by the testimonies of God's saints as they bore witness to that Friend who sticketh closer than a brother. As we listened, our hearts yearned for a similar experience, but as yet we had no personal acquaintance with Him. When one day, perhaps we were waiting on the ministry of one of God's servants, or maybe we were alone in our room reading a portion of the Scriptures, or perhaps down on our knees crying to God to reveal His Son to us, or possibly, we were attending to the daily round of duty, when suddenly He who until then had been only a name, was revealed to us by God as a *living reality*. Then we could say with one of old,

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5).

And what is the consequence of such an experience? Ah! now the soul has been awakened, it feels some action is demanded of it. Such an one can no longer sit and *listen* to descriptions of Christ — he must rise and seek Him on his own account. Individual acquaintance with this unique and Divine Person is now desired above everything. The one thus awakened now seeks the Lord with all his heart. Thus it was with these two disciples of John. As they heard their master say "Behold the lamb of God," we read, "they *followed* Jesus" (verse 37).

“Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?” (John 1:38).

No sincere soul seeks or follows after Christ in vain. “Seek and ye shall find” is His own blessed promise. Accordingly, we find the Savior turning to and addressing these enquiring souls. “What seek ye?” He says to them. At first sight this question strikes us as strange. Some, perhaps, have regarded it as almost a rebuff; yet it cannot be that. Personally, we look upon these words of our Lord as designed to test the *motive* of these two men, and to help them understand their own *purpose*. There are a great variety of motives and influences which make people become the outward and professed followers of Christ. In the days of which our passage treats, many soon “followed” Christ because the crowd streamed after Him and carried them along with it. Many “followed” Him for what they could get the loaves and fishes, or the curing of their ailments and the healing of their loved ones. For a time many “followed” Him, doubtless, because it was the popular and respectable thing to do. But a few “followed” because they felt their deep need of Him, and were attracted by the perfections of His Person.

So it was then, and so it is now. Christ desired to be followed intelligently or not at all — that is, He will not accept formal or superstitious worship. What He wants is the heart — the heart that seeks Him for Himself! Hence the heart-searching question was put to these two men, “What seek ye?” What, dear reader, would be your answer to such a question? What seekest thou? The true answer to this question reveals your spiritual state. Let no one suppose he is not seeking anything. Such were an impossibility. Every heart has its object. If your heart is not set upon Christ Himself, it is set upon something which is not Christ. “*What seek ye?*” Is it gold, fame, ease and comfort, pleasure, or — what? On what is your *heart* set? Is it an increased knowledge of Christ, a more intimate acquaintance with Him, a closer walk with Him? Can you say, in measure at least,

“As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God’ (Psalm 42:1)!

It is beautiful to notice the reply made by these two earnest souls. “Master,” they said, “Where dwellest thou?” (John 1:38). It seems

strange that their answer to the Lord's query has puzzled so many who have pondered it. Most of the commentators have quite missed the point of these words and failed to see any direct connection between the question put by the Savior and the reply He received. "Where dwellest thou?" Let us emphasize each word separately.

"*Where* dwellest thou?" How pathetic and tragic! What a question to ask the Son of God! How it brought out His humiliation! There was no need to ask where Caiaphas or Pilate dwelt, for everybody knew. But who among men cared to know, or could have told these two men if asked, where Christ dwelt?

"Where *dwellest* thou?" This was no question of mere idle curiosity. It showed that they longed to be with Him. What they desired was fellowship, as would have been made more evident if the translators had rendered it "Where abidest thou?" for "abiding" ever has reference to communion.

"Where dwellest *thou*?" they asked, in answer to "What seek ye?" It was not a "what" but a "whom" that their hearts were set upon. It was not a blessing, but the Blessor Himself that their spirits sought.

Unspeakably blessed it is to listen to the Savior's response to the request made by these two inquiring souls: "He saith unto them, Come and see" (John 1:39). Ah, He knew their desires. He had read their hearts. He discerned that they sought His presence, His person, His fellowship. And He never disappoints such longings. "Come" is His gracious invitation. "Come" was a word which assured them of His welcome. "Come" is what He still says to all who labor and are heavy laden.

"And see" or "look:" this was, we believe, a further word to test them. When Christ conducted these two men to His dwelling place, would a brief visit suffice them? No, indeed. Mark the remainder of the verse, "they came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour." So fully had He won their confidence, so completely had He attracted their hearts to Himself, that though this was the first day of meeting with the Savior, they abode with Him. Yes, they "abode" with Him. This is the word which uniformly speaks of *spiritual fellowship*. They abode with Him that day; for it was about the tenth hour; that is 4 P.M. We

doubt not they remained with Him that night, but this is not expressly stated, and why? Ah, the Holy Spirit would not say they abode with Him “that night,” for there is *no night* in His presence! Notice, too, the name of the place where He dwelt is not given. They “abode with him,” where this is we are not told: He was but a stranger here, and those who follow Him must be strangers too. “They abode with him.” How blessed! His abiding place was theirs too. And so shall it be for all believers throughout eternity. Has He not said,

“I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am,  
*there ye may be also*” (John 14:3)?

“One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:40, 41).

How this tells of the *satisfaction* which these two disciples had found in Christ! They wished to share with others their newborn joy! Andrew now sought out his brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Christ.” That it is here said “He first findeth his own brother,” implies that John (who ever seeks to hide himself, never once mentioning himself by name) did the same with his brother, James, a little later. This is the happy privilege of every young believer — to tell others of the Savior he has found. For this no college training is required, and no authority from any church need be sought. Not that we despise either of these, but all that is needed to tell a perishing sinner of the Savior is a heart acquaintance with Him yourself. It was not that Andrew went forth as a preacher, for that work he needed training, training by Christ Himself. But he set out to bear simple yet earnest witness of the Savior he had found. The one whom he sought was his own brother, and this illustrates the fact that our personal responsibility begins with those nearest to us. Witness should first be borne in our own family circle.

“And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona (or, perhaps better,

‘the son of John’): thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42).

Here we find the Lord giving Simon a blessed promise, the force of which must be sought in what he was by nature. By natural temperament Simon was fiery and impetuous, rash and unstable. What would such a man’s thoughts be, when he first heard Andrew? When he learned that Christ was here, and received invitation to go to Him, when he knew that the Master was seeking loyal and devoted servants, would he not say, That is all right for steady, reliable Andrew, but not for such as me? Would he not say, Why, I would be a stumblingblock to the cause of Christ: my impetuous temper and hasty tongue will only hinder, not help? If such thoughts passed through his mind, as we think most likely, then how these words of Christ which now fell on his ears must have reassured his heart: “When Jesus *beheld* him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of John.” Thus the Lord showed that He was already thoroughly acquainted with Simon. But, He adds, “Thou shalt be called, A stone.” “Cephas” was Aramaic, and signifies “a rock.” “Petros” is the Greek and signifies “a stone.” Peter is the English form of both Cephas and Petros. How blessed, then, was this promise of our Lord! “Thou art Simon” (his natural name), vacillating and unstable. Yes, I *know* all about you, “But thou shalt be called Cephas” (his new name), “a rock,” fixed and stable. Christ, thus, promised to undertake for him. What a blessed fulfillment did this promise receive after the Savior’s resurrection!

We believe, though, there is a deeper meaning in this verse, and one which has a wider application, an application to all believers. In these verses which treat of the third “day,” we have that which belongs, strictly, to the Christian dispensation. Peter must be viewed as a representative character. Thus viewed, everything turns upon the meaning of ‘the proper nouns here. Simon means “hearing.” Son of Jona is, correctly rendered we believe, in the R.V. “son of John,” and John signifies “God’s gift.” We become Christians by hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17), and this spiritual hearing is God’s gift, and every believer becomes a stone; comp. “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5).

“The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me” (John 1:43).

How precious is this! What a lovely illustration of His own declaration

“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

How it shows us the Good Shepherd going after this lone sheep of His! What we read of here is equally true of every case of genuine conversion. Whether the Lord uses a human instrument or not, it is Christ Himself who seeks out and finds each one who, subsequently, becomes His follower. Our seeking of Him is only the reflex action of His first seeking us, just as we love Him because He first loved us.

“Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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” (John 1:44, 45).

Here, again, we see the effect that Christ’s revelation of Himself has upon the newly born soul. The young believer partakes of the spirit of the One in whom he has believed. The compassion of the Savior for the lost now fills his heart. There is a going out of his affections toward the perishing. He cannot remain silent or indifferent. He must tell others of the Savior he has found, or rather, of the Savior who has found him.

“And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

The one who seeks to win souls must expect to be met with objections. Many a sinner is hiding behind queries and quibbles. How then shall we meet them. Learn from Philip. All that he said to Nathanael in reply to his question, was, “Come and see.” He invited his brother to come and *put Christ to the test* for himself. This is the wise way: do not be turned aside by the objections of the one to whom you are speaking, but continue to press upon him *the claims of Christ*, and then trust God to bless His own Word, in His own good time.

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile” (John 1:47).

Nathanael was honest and open. His question to Philip was no mere evasion, or hypocritical quibble; rather was it the voicing of a genuine difficulty. This must not be forgotten in our dealings with different souls. We must not conclude that all questions put to us are asked in a carping spirit. There are some people, many Perhaps, who have *real* difficulties. What they need is light, and in order to obtain this they need to come to Christ. So in every case we cannot err if we present Christ and His claims upon each soul we meet. Nathanael was an “Israelite, indeed, in whom was no guile.” We take it, he illustrates in his person one of the qualifications for becoming a good-ground hearer of the Word, namely, to receive that Word into “an honest and good heart.”

“Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (John 1:48).

How this incident evidences the Deity of Christ! It displayed His omniscience. Christ saw Nathanael, and read his heart, before he came to Him. And, dear reader, He sees and reads each of us, too. Nothing can be hid from His all-seeing eye. No guise of hypocrisy can deceive Him.

“Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel” (John 1:49).

This was sure evidence that a Divine work had been wrought in Nathanael’s soul. The eyes of his understanding were opened to behold the Divine glory of the Savior. And promptly does he confess Him as “the Son of God.” It is significant that in this fourth Gospel we find there are just seven who bear witness to Christ’s Deity.

**First**, John the Baptist (John 1:34); **Second**, Nathanael (John 1:49); **Third**, Peter (John 6:69); **Fourth**, the Lord Himself (John 10:36); **Fifth**, Martha (John 11:27); **Sixth**, Thomas (John 20:28);

**Seventh**, the writer of this Gospel (John 20:31).

“Jesus answered and said unto him, 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 the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:50, 51).

Nathanael had been deeply impressed by what he had just witnessed, namely, this manifestation of Christ’s omniscience. But, says the Lord, he should yet see greater things. Yea, the time should come when he should behold an open heaven, and the earth directly connected with it. He should see that to which in the far past, the dream and vision of Jacob had pointed: that which should be the antitype of the ladder which linked earth to heaven, was Christ Himself, and Nathanael with all believers, will see “the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

It only remains for us to point out that here in the last half of John 1 we have three very remarkable typical pictures, treating of three distinct Dispensations. The first is found in John 1:19-28. The second begins at John 1:29 — “The next day” — and ends at John 1:34. The third begins at John 1:35 — “Again the next day” — and ends at John 1:42.

I. In John 1:19-28 we have a typical picture of the Old Testament Dispensation.

1. Note the mention of the “priests and Levites” (verse 19), as representing the whole Levitical economy.
2. Note that “Jerusalem” is referred to here in this section (verse 19), but in none of the others.
3. Note how Israel’s spiritual state during Old Testament times is here pictured by the ignorance and lack of discernment of the Jews (verse 19).
4. Note the reference here to “Elijah,” and “that Prophet” who was to be like unto Moses (verse 21).
5. Note that John is here seen in the wilderness (verse 23), symbolical of Israel’s spiritual barrenness up to the time of Christ’s appearing.

6. Note how accurately John's words, "there standeth one among you, whom ye know not" (verse 26), depicted Israel's blindness to the presence of Jehovah in their midst all through the Old Testament era.
7. Note that John bears witness to One who was to come "after" him (verse 27): such was the witness borne to Christ during Old Testament times.

II. In John 1:29-34 we have a typical picture of the *Messianic Dispensation* (embracing the period of Christ's public ministry on earth) intimated here by the words "The *next day*" (verse 29).

1. Note "John seeth Jesus coming unto him" (verse 29): this gives the historic beginning of that dispensation, for "the law and the prophets were until John" (Luke 16:16).
2. John proclaims Christ as "the lamb of God" (verse 29): it was to offer Himself in sacrifice that He had come here.
3. "After me" (verse 30); that is, after John the Baptist, who rely resented in his own person the terminal of the Old Testament dispensation.
4. "And I knew him not" (verse 31): this represents the ignorance of the Jews when Christ appeared.
5. "He shall be made manifest to Israel" (verse 31): cf. Matthew 15:24, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
6. "The Spirit... abode upon him" (verse 32), and upon no others during that dispensation.
7. "This is the Son of God" (verse 34): it was as such Israel rejected Him.

III. In John 1:35-43 we have a typical picture of the *Christian Dispensation*, intimated by "Again the next day" (verse 35);

1. "The next day after, John stood" (verse 35): the end of John's activities were now reached: cf. verse 39 "the tenth hour" — the full measure of Israel's responsibility (cf. the ten commandments) was now reached.

2. There is here a turning away from Judaism, represented by John, and a following of the Lord Jesus (verses 35-37): note Jesus “walked”
3. this was in contrast from John “stood.”
4. It is as “the Lamb of God” Christians first know Christ (verse 36).
5. “They followed Jesus” (verse 37): this is what the Christian walk is,
6. “He has left us an example that we should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).
7. Believers now abide with Christ (verse 39): that is, they enjoy communion with Him, meanwhile hidden from the world.
8. Christianity is to be propagated by the personal efforts of individual believers (verses 40, 41).
9. Unto Simon Christ said, “Thou shalt be called a stone” (verse 42): it is as “living stones” that believers of this dispensation are “built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5), which is “a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

The following questions are given to be studied so as to prepare the reader for our next chapter on John 2:1-11: —

1. “And the third day” (John 2:1) — after what? And why mention which “day?”
2. Why is a marriage scene introduced at this point?
3. Why is the “mother” of Jesus so prominent?
4. What is signified by the two statements made by the Lord to His mother in John 2:4?
5. What is the typical significance of the “six waterpots of stone” (John 2:6)?
6. Of what is “wine” (John 2:10), the emblem?
7. What are the central lessons to be learned from this first miracle of Christ?

# JOHN 2:1-11

## CHRIST'S FIRST MIRACLE

First of all we will give a brief and simple Analysis of the passage before us: —

1. The Occasion of the Miracle: a marriage in Cana, verse 1.
2. The Presence there of the Mother of Jesus, verse 1.
3. The Savior and His Disciples Invited, verse 2.
4. Mary's Interference and Christ's Rebuke, verses 3, 4.
5. Mary's Submission, verse 5.
6. The Miracle Itself, verses 6-8.
7. The Effects of the Miracle, verses 9-11.

We propose to expound the passage before us from a threefold viewpoint: first, its *typical* significance, second, its *prophetic* application, third, its *practical* teaching. It is as though the Holy Spirit had here combined three pictures into one. We might illustrate it by the method used in printing a picture in colors. There is first the picture itself in its black-edged outline; then, on top of this, is filled in the first coloring — red, or yellow, as the case may be; finally, the last color — blue or brown — may be added to the others, and the composite and variegated picture is complete. To use the terms of the illustration, it is our purpose to examine, separately, the different tints and shadings in the Divine picture which is presented to our view in the first half of John 2.

### THE TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

It is to be carefully noted that this second chapter of John opens with the word “and,” which indicates that its contents are closely connected with what has gone before. One of the things that is made prominent in John 1 (following the Introduction, which runs to the end of verse 18) is the failure of Judaism, and the turning away from it to Christ. The failure of Judaism (seen in the ignorance of the Sanhedrin) is made plain by the sending of priests and Levites from Jerusalem to enquire of John who he was (John 1:19). This is made still more evident by the pathetic statement of the Baptist, “There

standeth one among you, whom ye know not” (John 1:26). All this is but an amplification of that tragic word found in John 1:11 — “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” So blind were the religious leaders of Israel, that they neither knew the Christ of God stood in their midst, nor recognized His forerunner to whom the Old Testament Scriptures bore explicit witness.

Judaism was but a dead husk, the heart and life of it were gone. Only one thing remained, and that was the setting of it aside, and the bringing in “of a better hope.” Accordingly, we read in Galatians 4:4, ‘But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son.’ Yes, the fulness of God’s time had come. The hour was ripe for Christ to be manifested. The need of Him had been fully demonstrated. Judaism must be set aside. A typical picture of this was before us in John 1. The Baptist wound up the Old Testament system (“The law and the prophets were *until John*” — Luke 16:16), and in John 1:35-37 we are shown two (the number of competent testimony) of His disciples leaving John, and following the Lord Jesus.

The same principle is illustrated again in the chapter now before us. A marriage-feast is presented to our view, and the central thing about it is that *the wine had given out*. The figure is not difficult to interpret: “Wine” in Scripture is the emblem of joy, as the following passage will show: “And wine that *maketh glad* the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15); “And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, *which cheereth God and man?*” (Judges 9:13). How striking, then, is what we have here in John 2! How accurate the picture. Judaism still existed as a religious system, but it ministered no comfort to the heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, utterly destitute of joy in God. Israel had lost the joy of their espousals.

“And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews” (verse 6).

What a portrayal of Judaism was this! Six is the number of *man*, for it was on the sixth day man was made, and of the Superman it is written,

“Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore six” (Revelation 13:18).

Yes, there were six waterpots standing there, not seven, the perfect number. All that was left of Judaism was of the flesh; God was not in it. As we read later on in this Gospel, the “feasts of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:2) were now only “the feast of the *Jews*” (John 2:13, etc.).

Observe, too, that these six waterpots were of “stone,” not silver which speaks of redemption, nor of gold which tells of Divine glory. As we read in Isaiah 1:22, “Thy silver is become dross,” and again in Lamentations 4:1, “How is the gold become dim?” Profoundly significant, then, were these waterpots of “*stone*.” And what is the more noticeable, *they were empty*. Again, we say, what a vivid portrayal have we here of Israel’s condition at that time! No wonder the wine had given out! To supply *that* Christ was needed. Therefore, our chapter at once directs attention to Him as the One who alone can provide that which speaks of joy in God. Thus does John 2 give us another representation of the failure of Judaism, and the turning away from it to the Savior. Hence, it opens with the word “and,” as denoting the continuation of the same subject which had been brought out in the previous chapter.

In striking accord with what we have just suggested above, is the further fact, that in this scene of the Cana-marriage feast, the mother of Jesus occupies such a prominent position. It is to be noted that she is not here called by her personal name — as she is in Acts 1:14 — but is referred to as “the mother of Jesus.” (John 2:1). She is, therefore, to be viewed as a *representative* character. In this chapter Mary occupies the same position as the Baptist did in John 1. She stands for the *nation of Israel*. Inasmuch as through her the long promised “seed” had come, Mary is to be regarded here as gathering up into her person the entire Abrahamic stock.

What, then, does the Holy Spirit record here of Mary? Were her actions on this occasion in keeping with the representative character she filled? They certainly were. The record is exceedingly brief, but what is said is enough to confirm our line of interpretation. The mother of Jesus exhibited a woeful lack of spiritual discernment. It

seems as if she presumed so far as to *dictate* to the Lord. Apparently she ventured to order the Savior, and tell Him what to do. No otherwise can we account for the reply that He made to her on this occasion — “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” It was a pointed rebuke, and as such His words admonished her for her failure to render Him the respect and reverence which, as the Lord of Glory, were His due.

We believe that this unwonted interference of Mary was prompted by the same carnal motive as actuated His unbelieving “brethren” (i.e. other sons of Mary and Joseph) on a later occasion. In John 7:2-5 we read,

“Now the Jews feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.”

Mary wanted the Savior to openly display His power and glory, and, accordingly, she was a true representative of the Jewish nation. Israel had no thought and had no heart for a suffering Messiah; what they desired was One who would immediately set up His kingdom here on earth. Thus, in Mary’s ignorance (at that time) of the real character of Christ’s mission, in her untimely longing for Him to openly display His power and glory, and in Christ’s word of rebuke to her, “What have I to do with thee?” we have added evidence of the typical significance of this scene at the Cana marriage-feast — *the setting aside of Israel after the flesh.*

### **THE PROPHETIC APPLICATION.**

What is recorded here in the first part of John 2 looks beyond the conditions that obtained in Israel at that time. The miracle which Christ performed at Cana possessed a *prophetic* significance. Like so much that is found in Scripture, the passage before us needs to be studied from a twofold viewpoint: its *immediate* and its *remote* applications. Above, we have sought to bring out what we believe to

be the direct significance of this incident, in its typical and representative suggestiveness. Now we would turn for a moment to contemplate its more distant and prophetic application.

“And the third day:” so our chapter opens. The Holy Spirit presents to our view a third day scene. The third day is the day of resurrection. It was on the third day that the earth emerged from its watery grave, as it was on the third day the barren earth was clothed with vegetable life (Genesis 1:9, 11). There is an important scripture in Hosea 6:2 which should be placed side by side with John 2:1:

“After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.”

For almost two thousand years (two Days with God — see 2 Peter 3:8) Israel has been without a king, without a priest, without a home. But the second “Day” is almost ended, and when the third dawns, their renaissance shall come.

This second chapter of John presents us with a prophetic foreshadowing of the future. It gives us a typical picture of Christ — the Third Day, following the two days (the two thousand years) of Israel’s dispersion. Then will Israel invite Jesus to come to them: for, not until they say “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” will He return to the earth. Then will the Lord be married to the new Israel, see Isaiah 54; Hosea 2, etc. Then will Christ turn the water into wine — fill Israel’s hearts with joy. Then will Israel say to the Gentiles (their servants), “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do.” Then will Israel render unqualified obedience to Jehovah, for He will write His law in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). Then will Christ “manifest His glory” (John 2:11) cf. Matthew 25:31; and thus will the best wine be reserved for Israel until the last.

Having touched, somewhat briefly, upon the typical and prophetic significance of this miracle, we turn now to consider,

### **THE PRACTICAL TEACHING.**

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage” (verses 1, 2).

Christ here sanctifies the marriage relationship. Marriage was ordained by God in Eden and in our lesson, the Savior, for all time, set His stamp of approval upon it. To be present at this marriage was almost Christ's first public appearance after His ministry commenced. By gracing this festive gathering, our Lord distinguished and glorified this sacred institution. Observe that Christ was invited to be there. Christ's presence is essential to a happy marriage. The marriage where there is no place for our Lord and Savior cannot be blest of God:

[“Whatsoever ye do... do all to the glory of God” \(1 Corinthians 10:31\).](#)

[“And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine” \(John 2:3\).](#)

Mary's words seem to indicate two things: first, she ignored His Deity. Was she not aware that He was more than man? Did she not know that He was God manifest in the flesh? and, therefore, omniscient. He knew that they had no wine. Second, it appears as though Mary was seeking to exert her parental authority, by suggesting to Him what He ought to do under the circumstances.

[“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee?” \(John 2:4\).](#)

This is an elliptical expression, and in the Greek literally read, “What to Me and thee?” We take it that the force of this question of our Lord's was, What is there common to Me and thee — cf Matthew 8:29 for a similar grammatical construction. It was not that the Savior resented Mary's inviting His aid, but a plain intimation that she must allow Him to act in His own way. Christ here showed that His season of subjection to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51) was over, His public ministry had now commenced and she must not presume to dictate to Him.

Many of our readers, no doubt, have wondered why Christ here addressed His mother as “Woman.” Scholars tell us that at the time our Lord used this word it would not sound harsh or rough. It was a designation commonly used for addressing females of all classes and relationships, and was sometimes employed with great reverence

and affection. Proof of this is seen in the fact that while on the Cross itself Christ addressed Mary as “Woman,” saying, “Behold thy son” (John 19:26 and see also John 20:13, 15).

But we believe our Lord chose this word with Divine discrimination, and for at least two reasons. First, because He was here calling attention to the fact that He was more than man, that He was none less than the Son of God. To have addressed her as “mother” would have called attention to *human* relationships; but calling her “woman” showed that God was speaking to her. We may add that it is significant that the two times Christ addressed His mother as “woman” are both recorded in the Gospel of John which sets forth His Deity.

Again, the employment of this term “woman” denotes Christ’s omniscience. With prophetic foresight He anticipated the horrible idolatry which was to ascribe Divine honors to her. He knew that in the centuries which were to follow, men would entitle her the Queen of angels and the Mother of God. Hence, He refused to use a term which would in any wise countenance the monstrous system of Mariolatry. Christ would here teach us that Mary was only a *woman* — “Blessed *among* women” (Luke 1:28) but not “blessed *above* women.”

“Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4) became the most solemn watchword of His life, marking the stages by which He drew nigh to His death. Seven references are made in this Gospel to that awful “hour.”

The first is in our present passage in John 2:4. The second is found in John 7:30 —

“Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because *his hour* was not yet come.”

The third time is found in John 8:20 —

“And no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.”

The fourth is in John 12:23 —

“And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.”

The fifth is in John 12:27 —

“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.”

The sixth is in John 16:32 —

“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.”

The seventh is in John 17:1 —

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee.”

This “hour” was the hour of His *humiliation*. It was the “hour” of His *suffering*. But why should Christ refer to this “hour” when Mary was seeking to dictate to Him? Ah, surely the answer is not far to seek. That awful “hour” to which he looked forward, was the time when He would *be subject to man’s will*, for then He would be delivered up into the hands of sinners. But until then, He was not to be ordered by man; instead, He was about His Father’s business, seeking only to do His will.

“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do” (John 2:5).

This is very beautiful. Mary meekly accepted the Lord’s rebuke, recognized His rights to act as He pleased, and left the matter entirely in His hands. There is an important and much neglected lesson here for each of us. How prone we are to dictate to God! How often we are disposed to tell Him what to do! This is only another evidence of that detestable self-will which still operates in the believer, unless Divine grace subdues it. Our plain duty is to commit our way unto the Lord and then leave Him to supply our need in His own good time and manner.

We turn now to consider the miracle which Christ performed here at Cana. And first, a few words upon the occasion of it. The Lord Jesus recognized in this request of Mary's a call from His Father. He discerned in this simple act of furnishing the wedding-guests with wine a very different thing from what His mother saw. The performing of this miracle marked an important crisis in the Savior's career. His act of turning the water into wine would alter the whole course of His life. Hitherto He had lived in quiet seclusion in Nazareth, but from this time on He would become a public and marked character. From henceforth He would scarcely have leisure to eat, and His opportunity for retired communion with the Father would be only when others slept. If He performed this miracle, and manifested forth His glory, He would become the gazing stock of every eye, and the common talk of every tongue. He would be followed about from place to place, thronged and jostled by vulgar crowds. This would provoke the jealousy of religious leaders, and He would be spied upon and regarded as a public menace. Later, this would eventuate in His being seized as a notorious criminal, falsely accused, and sentenced to be crucified. All of this stood out before Him as He was requested to supply the needed wine. But He did not shrink. He had come to do the will of God, no matter what the cost. May we not say it reverently, that as He stood there by Mary's side and listened to her words, that *the Cross* challenged Him. Certainly it was here anticipated, and hence His solemn reference to His "hour" yet to come.

In the second place, the *manner* in which the miracle was performed is deserving of our closest attention.

“And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare”  
(John 2:6-8).

Christ was the One to work the miracle, yet the “servants” were the ones who seemed to do everything. *They* filled the waterpots, they drew off the wine, they bore it to the governor of the feast. There

was no visible exhibition of putting forth of Divine power. Christ pronounced no magical formula: He did not even command the water to become wine. What was witnessed by the spectators was men at work, not God creating out of nothing. And all this speaks loudly to us. It was a parable in action. The means used were human, the result was seen to be Divine.

This was Christ's first miracle, and in it He shows us that God is pleased to use human instrumentality in performing the wonders of His grace. The miracle consisted in the supplying of wine and, as previously pointed out, wine symbolizes joy in God. Learn then, that the Lord is pleased to employ human agents in bringing joy to 'the hearts of men. And what was the element Christ used on this occasion in producing the wine? It was water. Now "water" is one of the symbols of the written Word (see Ephesians 5:26). And how may we His servants, today, bring the wine of joy unto human hearts? By ministering the Word (see Ephesians 5:26). And how may we His servants, today, "servants" Christ's command to fill those six empty waterpots of stone with water, might have seemed meaningless, if not foolish; but their obedience made them fellow-workers in the miracle! And to the wise of this world, who put their trust in legislation, and social amelioration, it seems useless to go forth unto the wicked with nothing more in our hands than a Book written almost two thousand years ago. Nevertheless, it has pleased God "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" — foolish, that is, in the estimate of the worldly wise. Here then is blessed instruction for the servants of God today. Let us go forth with the Water of life, implicitly obeying the commands of our Lord, and He will use us to bring the wine of Divine joy to many a sad heart.

In the third place, consider the *teaching* of this miracle. In it we have a striking picture of *the regeneration of a sinner*.

**First**, we see the condition of the natural man before he is born again: he is like an empty waterpot of stone-cold, lifeless, useless.

**Second**, we see the worthlessness of man's religion to help the sinner. Those waterpots were set apart "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews" — they were designed for ceremonial purgation; but their valuelessness was shown by their emptiness.

**Third**, at the command of Christ they were filled with water, and water is one of the emblems of the written Word: it is the Word which God uses in quickening dead souls into newness of life. Observe, too, these waterpots were filled “up to the brim” — God always gives good measure; with no niggardly hand does He minister.

**Fourth**, the water produced wine, “good wine” (verse 10): symbol of the Divine joy which fills the soul of the one who has been “born of water.”

**Fifth**, we read “*This beginning of miracles did Jesus.*” That is precisely what the new birth is — a “miracle.” And not only so, it is always the “beginning of miracles” for the one newly born: regeneration is ever the initial work of grace.

**Sixth**, observe “this beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and *manifested forth His glory.*” It is thus, in the regeneration of dead sinners, that the “glory” of our Savior and Lord is “manifested.”

**Seventh**, observe, “And His disciples believed on him.” A dead man cannot believe. But the first movement of the newly born soul is to turn to Christ. Not that we argue an interval of time between the two, but as cause stands to effect so the work of regeneration precedes the act of believing in Christ — cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13: first, “sanctification of the Spirit,” which is the new birth, *then* “belief of the truth.”

But is there not even a deeper meaning to this beginning of Christ’s miracles? Is it not profoundly significant that in this first miracle which our Savior performed, the “wine,” which is the symbol of *His shed blood*, should be so prominent! The marriage-feast was the occasion of joy and merriment; and does not God give us here something more than a hint that in order for His people to be joyous, the precious blood of His Son must be first poured forth! Ah, that is the foundation of every blessing we enjoy, the ground of all our happiness. Hence did Christ *begin* His supernatural works of mercy by producing that which spoke of His sacrificial death.

“When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom” (John 2:9).

This parenthetical statement is most blessed. It illustrates an important principle. It was the servants — not the “disciples,” nor yet Mary — who were nearest to the Lord on this occasion, and who possessed the knowledge of His mind. What puzzled the “ruler of the feast” was no secret to these “servants.” How different are God’s ways from ours! The Lord of glory was here as “Servant.” In marvelous grace He came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister:” therefore, are those who are humble in service, and those engaged in the humblest service, nearest to Him. This is their reward for turning their backs upon the honors and emoluments of the world. As we read in Amos 3:7 —

“Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto (Ah, unto whom?) his servants the prophets.”

It is like what we read in Psalm 103:7 — “He made known his ways unto Moses;” and who was Moses? Let Scripture answer: “Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3)! Yes, “the *meek* will he guide in judgment: and the *meek* will he teach his way” (Psalm 25:9).

Those who determine to occupy the position of authority (as *Mary* did here) are not taken into the Lord’s secrets. Those who wish to be in a place like the “*ruler* of the feast,” know not His thoughts. But those who humble themselves to take the servant position, who place themselves at Christ’s disposal, are the ones who share His counsels. And in the day to come, when He will provide the true wine of the kingdom, those who have served Him during the time of His absence, shall then be under Him the dispensers of joy. Has he not promised, “If any man *serve me*, him will my Father *honor*?”

“And saith unto him, 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” (John 2:10).

This illustrates the ways of men and the ways of God. The world (and Satan also) gives its best first, and keeps the worst for the last. First the pleasures of sin — for a season — and then the *wages* of sin. But with God it is the very opposite. He brings His people into the wilderness before He brings them into the promised inheritance. First the Cross then the crown. Fellow believer, for us, the best wine is yet to be:

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

One more observation on this passage and we must close. What a message is there here for the unsaved! The natural man has a “wine” of his own. There is a carnal happiness enjoyed which is produced by “the pleasures of sin” — the merriment which this world affords. But how fleeting this is! How unsatisfying! Sooner or later this “wine,” which is pressed from “the vine of the earth” (Revelation 14:18), gives out. The poor sinner may be surrounded by gay companions, he may be comfortably circumstanced financially and socially, yet the time comes when he discovers he has “no wine.” Happy the one who is conscious of this. The discovery of our own wretchedness is often the turning point. It prepares us to look to that One who is ready

“to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of *joy* for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3).

Unbelieving friend, there is only One who can furnish the true “wine,” the “good” wine, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He can satisfy the longing of the soul. He can quench the thirst of the heart. He can put a song into thy mouth which not even the angels can sing, even the song of Redemption. What then must you do? What price must you pay? Ah, dear friend, listen to the glad tidings of grace: “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).

And now, we give a number of questions to prepare the interested student for the lesson to follow. Study, then, and prayerfully meditate on the following questions: —

1. Why is the cleansing of the temple referred to just here? — Note its place in the other Gospels.
2. Why did not Christ drive out “the doves?” verse 16.
3. What was indicated by the Jews’ demand for a “sign?” verse 18.
4. Why did Christ point them forward to His resurrection? verses 18- 21.
5. Did the Lord’s own disciples believe in the promise of His resurrection? If not, why? verse 22.
6. What solemn warning does verse 23 point?
7. What does verse 25 prove concerning Christ?

# JOHN 2:12-25

## CHRIST CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days” (John 2:12).

This verse comes in as a parenthesis between the two incidents of the Cana marriage-feast and the cleansing the temple. Like everything else in this chapter, it may be studied from a twofold viewpoint, namely, its immediate application and its remote. In both of these applications the reference to *Capernaum* is the key, and Capernaum stands for two things — Divine favor and Divine judgment; see Matthew 11:23.

Taking the immediate application first, this verse tells us that for a short season Israel occupied the position of being in God’s peculiar favor. The mother of Jesus (as we saw in our last chapter) stands for the nation of Israel, and particularly for Israel’s *privileges* — for she was the one most honored among women. “His brethren” represents the nation of Israel in unbelief; proof of this is found in John 7:5. “His disciples” were the little remnant in Israel who did believe in Him, see John 2:11. With these, the Lord Jesus went down to Capernaum; but they “continued there not many days.” Not for long was Israel to enjoy these special favors of God. Soon Christ would leave them.

But this twelfth verse also has a prophetic significance. Its double application being suggested by the twofold meaning of Capernaum. Capernaum, which was exalted to heaven, was to be brought down to hell. Hence the force of “He went down to Capernaum.” So it was with the nation of Israel. They had been marvelously favored of God, and they should be as severely punished. They should go *down* into the place of punishment — for this is what Capernaum speaks of. And this is exactly where the Jews have been all through this Christian dispensation. And how blessed to note that as the mother, brethren, and disciples of Christ (who represented, respectively, the nation of Israel privileged, but unbelieving, and the little remnant who did believe) went *down* to Capernaum — the place of Divine

judgment — that the Lord Jesus went with them. So it has been throughout this Christian dispensation. The Jews have suffered severely, under the chastisements of God, but the Lord had been with them in their dispersion — otherwise they, had been utterly consumed long, long ago. The statement they continued there *not many days*” is also in perfect keeping with its prophetic significance and application. Only two “days” shall Israel abide in that place of which Capernaum speaks; on the third “day” they shall be delivered — see Hosea 6:2.

Let us now give a brief and simple Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: the Cleansing of the Temple: —

1. The Time of the Cleansing, verse 13.
2. The Need of the Cleansing, verse 14.
3. The Method of Cleansing, verses 15, 16.
4. The Cause of the Cleansing, verse 17.
5. The Jews’ demand for a Sign and Christ’s reply, verses 18-22.
6. Christ’s miracles in Jerusalem and the unsatisfactory result, verses 23, 24.
7. Christ’s knowledge of the human heart, verse 25.

We shall study this passage in a manner similar to that followed in our exposition of the first half of John 2, considering first, the typical meaning of the cleansing of the Temple; and, second, its practical suggestions.

### **THE TYPICAL MEANING.**

The first of the questions which we placed at the end of the last chapter, and which we asked our readers to meditate on in preparation for this, was, “Why is the cleansing of the temple referred to just here?” The careful student will have noticed that in each of the other Gospels, the cleansing of the temple is placed right at the close of our Lord’s public ministry, as one of the last things He did before His apprehension. But here, the Holy Spirit has placed Christ’s cleansing of the temple almost at the beginning of His public ministry. This has led the majority of the commentators to conclude that these were two totally different occasions and incidents, separated by a space of three years. In support of this

conclusion some plausible arguments are advanced, but we are not at all sure of their validity. Personally, we are strongly inclined to believe that what is recorded in Matthew 21:12, 13 is the same incident as is before us here in John 2, and that the Holy Spirit has ignored the chronological order (as is so often the case in the Gospels) for His own good reasons. What these reasons may be we shall suggest below. Before advancing them, let us first state why we regard the cleansing of the temple here in John 2 as being identical with that which is described in Matthew 21:12, 13, and the parallel passages in Mark and Luke.

The points of likeness between the two are so striking that unless there is irrefutable evidence that they are separate incidents, it seems to us the most natural and the most obvious thing to regard them as one and the same. We call attention to seven points of resemblance.

**First**, Matthew places the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of the *Passover* week, and John tells us that “the Jews” *Passover* was at hand (Matthew 2:12).

**Second**, Matthew mentions those that “*sold* and bought” being in the temple (Matthew 21:12); John says the Lord found in the temple “those that sold oxen,” etc. (John 2:14).

**Third**, Matthew refers to the presence of those that “sold *doves*” (Matthew 21:12); John also speaks of the “*doves*” (John 2:16).

**Fourth**, Matthew tells us that Christ “*overthrew* the tables of the money-changers” (Matthew 21:12); John also tells us that Christ “*overthrew* the tables” (John 2:15).

**Fifth**, Matthew mentions that Christ “*cast out all them* that sold and bought in the temple” (Matthew 21:12); John declares He “drove them all out of the temple” (John 2:15). Note, in the Greek it is the same word here translated “drove” as is rendered “cast out” in Matthew!

**Sixth**, Matthew declares Christ said,

“My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13);

John records that the Lord said,

“Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise” (John 2:16).

We have no doubt that the Lord made *both* of these statements in the same connection, but John records the one which expressly affirmed His Divine Sonship. In each case Christ declared the temple was God’s.

**Seventh**, Matthew records how Christ spent the night in Bethany, and next morning He returned to Jerusalem, and was in the temple teaching, when the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him and said, “By what authority *doest thou these things?*” (Matthew 21:23). John also records that after Christ had cleansed the temple, the Jews said to Him,

“What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou *doest these things?*” (John 2:18).

If, then, our conclusion be correct, that this cleansing of the Temple occurred at the close of our Lord’s ministry, the question returns upon us, *Why* has the Holy Spirit taken this incident out of its chronological setting and placed it by the side of our Lord’s miracle where He changed the water into wine? We believe the answer to this question is not far to seek. We suggest that there was a double reason for placing this incident in juxtaposition with the Cana marriage-feast scene. First, it furnished added proof of the abject failure of Judaism; second, it completed the prophetic picture of Christ in the Millenium which John 2 supplies. We shall enlarge upon each of these points below.

In the previous chapters we have pointed out how that in the opening portion of John’s Gospel two things are noticed repeatedly — the setting aside of Judaism, and the turning away from it to Christ. This was emphasized at some length in our last chapter, where we showed that the giving out of the wine at the Cana marriage-feast, and the presence of the six waterpots of stone standing there empty, symbolized the spiritual condition of Israel at that time — they had lost the joy of their espousals and were devoid of spiritual life.

In the passage which is now before us, an even darker picture still is presented to view. Here all figures and symbols are dropped, and the miserable state of Judaism is made known in pointed and plain terms. Up to this stage, Israel's miserable condition spiritually, had been expressed by negatives; the Messiah was there in their midst, but, said His forerunner to the Jerusalem embassy, Him "ye know not" (John 1:26); so, again, in the first part of chapter 2, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). But here, in the second half of John 2, the positive evil which existed is fully exposed the temple was profaned.

["And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" \(John 2:13\).](#)

Here is the first key to that which follows. The "*Lord's* passover" (Exodus 12:11) had degenerated into "the passover *of the Jews.*" But this is not the particular point upon which we would now dwell. What we would call attention to, particularly, is the time-mark given here. Two things are linked together; the passover and the cleansing of the temple. Now the reader will recall at once, that one of the express requirements of God in connection with the observance of the passover was, that all leaven must be rigidly excluded from the houses of His people. The passover was a busy time for every Jewish family: each home was subject to a rigorous examination, lest ceremonial defilement, in the form of leaven, should be found therein. "No leaven in your houses" was the requirement of the Law.

Now the center of Israel's ceremonial purity was the temple, the Father's House. Israel gloried in the temple, for it was one of the chief things which marked them off from all other nations, as the favored people of God. What other race of people could speak of Jehovah dwelling in their midst? And now Jehovah Himself was there, incarnate. And what a sight met His eye! The House of prayer had become a house of merchandise; the holy place of worship was now "a den of thieves." Behold here the light shining in the darkness and exposing the real nature of things. No doubt the custodians of the temple would have stood ready to excuse this reproach upon God's honor. They would have argued that these money changers and cattle dealers, in the temple courts, were there as a convenience to those who came to the temple to worship. But Christ lays bare

their real motive. “Den of thieves” tells us that the love of money, covetousness, lay at the bottom of it all.

And what is “covetousness?” What is the Divine symbol for it? Let us turn the light of Scripture on these questions. Notice carefully what is said in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. Writing to the Corinthian believers, the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul says, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” To what was he referring here under the figure of “leaven?” Mark what follows:

“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolators” (verses 9, 10).

Leaven, then, here refers (among other things) to *covetousness, extortion and idolatry*. Now go back again to John 2. The feast of the passover was at hand, when all leaven must be removed from Israel’s dwellings. And there in the temple, were the cattle dealers and moneychangers, actuated by covetousness and practicing extortion. What horrible desecration was this! Leaven in the temple of God!

But let us turn on the light of one more passage. In Colossians 3:5 we read, “covetousness, which is *idolatry*.” Ah, does not this reveal the emptiness of Israel’s boast! The nation prided itself upon its monotheism they worshipped not the many gods of the heathen. The Jews boasted that they were free from idolatry. Yet *idolatry* — “covetousness” — was the very thing the Son of God found in His Father’s House. Note again, the force of 1 Corinthians 5:10, covetousness, extortion, and idolatry are the three things there mentioned under the symbol of “leaven.” Here, then, is the first reason why the Holy Spirit has placed this incident just where He has in this Gospel. It furnishes a striking climax to what has gone before. Put together these three things, and see what a glaring picture they give us of Judaism: first, a *blinded priesthood* (John

1:19-26); second, a *joyless nation* (no “wine,” John 2:3); third, a *desecrated temple*. (John 2:16).

We turn now to consider

## **THE PRACTICAL LESSONS.**

1. We see here the holy zeal of Christ for the Father’s house.

“Worshippers coming from remote parts of the Holy Land, found it a convenience to be able to purchase on the spot the animals used in sacrifice. Traders were not slow to supply this demand, and vying with one another they crept nearer and nearer to the sacred precincts, until some, under pretense of driving in an animal for sacrifice, made a sale within the outer court. This court had an area of about 14 acres, and was separated from the inner court by a wall breast high, and bearing intimations which forbade the encroachment of Gentiles on pain of death. Round this outer court ran marble colonnades, richly ornamented and supported by four rows of pillars, and roofed with cedar, affording ample shade to the traders.

“There were not only cattle-dealers and sellers of doves, but also money-changers; for every Jew had to pay to the Temple treasury an annual tax of half a shekel, and this tax could be paid only in sacred currency. No foreign coin, with its emblem of submission to an alien king, was allowed to pollute the Temple. Thus there came to be need of money-changers, not only for the Jew who had come up to the feast from a remote part of the empire, but even for the inhabitants of Palestine, as the Roman coinage had displaced the shekel in ordinary use.

“Cattle-dealers and money-changers have always been notorious for making more than their own out of their bargains, and facts enough are on record to justify our Lord calling this particular market ‘a den of thieves.’ The poor were shamefully cheated, and the worship of God was hindered and impoverished instead of being facilitated and enriched. The worshipper who came to the temple seeking quiet and fellowship with God had to push his way through the touts of the dealers, and have his devotional temper dissipated by the wrangling and shouting of a cattlemarket. Yet although many must have

lamented this, no one had been bold enough to rebuke and abolish the glaring profanation” (Dr. Dods).

But the Lord Jesus Christ could not suffer His Father’s house to be reproached thus. Zeal for God consumes Him and without hesitation He cleanses the temple of those who defiled it.

2. “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” (John 2:15). How this brings out the Deity of Christ! First, He identifies Himself with the temple, terming it “My Father’s house,” and thus affirming His Divine Sonship. This was something which none other had dreamed of doing. Neither Moses, Solomon nor Ezra, ever termed the tabernacle or the temple his “Father’s house.” Christ alone could do this. Again; mark the result of His interference. One man, single handed, takes a whip and the whole crowd flees in fear before Him. Ah, this was no mere man. It was the terror of God that had fallen upon them.

3. This incident brings before us a side of Christ’s character which is almost universally ignored today. We think of the Lord Jesus as the gentle and compassionate One. And such He was, and still is. But this is not all He is. God is Light as well as Love. God is *inflexibly righteous* as well as infinitely gracious. God is holy as well as merciful. And we do well to remind ourselves of this. Scripture declares “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” as all who defy Him will yet discover. Scripture speaks of “the wrath of the lamb,” and our lesson furnishes us with a solemn illustration of this. The unresisting money-changers and cattle-dealers, fleeing in terror before His flashing eye and upraised hand, give warning of what shall happen when the wicked stand before the throne of His judgment.

4. This incident rebukes the present-day desecration of the house of prayer. If the holy anger of the Lord Jesus was stirred when He beheld the profanation of that House which was to be a “house of prayer,” if the idolatrous commercialization of it caused Him to cleanse it in such a drastic manner, how must He now regard many of the edifices which have been consecrated to His name! How tragically does history repeat itself. The things which are now done

in so many church-houses — the ice cream suppers, the bazaars, the moving picture shows and other forms of entertainment — what are these but idolatrous commercialization of these “houses of prayer.” No wonder that such places are devoid of spirituality and strangers to the power of God. The Lord will not tolerate an unholy mixture of worldly things with spiritual.

5. One of the questions we drew up at the close of the last chapter was, “Why did not Christ *drive out* the ‘doves?’” The answer to this is found in Isaiah 52:13, where God through His prophet, declared of the Messiah then to come, “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently.” The “prudence” of Christ was strikingly evidenced by His mode of procedure on this occasion of the cleansing of the temple. The attentive reader will observe that He distinguished, carefully, between the different objects of His displeasure. The oxen and sheep He *drove out*, and these were in no danger of being lost by this treatment. The money of the changers He *threw on the ground*, and this could be easily picked up again and carried away. The doves He simply ordered to be *taken away*: had He done more with them, they might have flown away, and been lost to their owners. Thus, the perfect One combined wisdom with zeal. How differently would Moses or Elijah have acted under similar circumstances. But even in His anger Christ deals in prudence. Christ rebuked all, yet none were really injured, and nothing was lost. O that we may learn of Him Who has left us such a perfect example.

6. “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us seeing that thou doest these things?” (John 2:18). This demand for a “sign” evidenced their blindness, and gave proof of what the Baptist had said — “There standeth one among you whom ye know not” (John 1:26). To have given them a sign, would only have been to confirm them in their unbelief. Men who could desecrate God’s house as they had, men who were utterly devoid of any sense of what was due Jehovah, were judicially blinded, and Christ treats them accordingly: “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (verse 19). He spoke in language which was quite unintelligible to them.

“Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:20, 21).

But why should the Lord express Himself in such ambiguous terms? Because, as He Himself said on another occasion,

“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matthew 13:13).

Yet, in reality, our Lord's reply to these Jews was much to the point. In raising Himself from the dead He would furnish the final proof that He was God manifest in flesh, and if God, then the One Who possessed the unequivocal right to cleanse the defiled temple which bore His name. It is very significant to compare these words of Christ here with what we find in Matthew 21:24-27, spoken, we doubt not, on the same occasion. When challenged as to His authority, Matthew tells us He appealed to the witness of His forerunner, which was primarily designed for the Jews after the flesh. But John mentions our Lord's appeal to His own resurrection, because this demonstrated His Deity, and has an evidential value for the whole household of faith.

7. Another of the questions asked at the close of the previous chapter was “Did the Lord's own disciples believe in the promise of His resurrection?” The answer is, No, they did not. The evidence for this is conclusive. The death of the Savior shattered their hopes. Instead of remaining in Jerusalem till the third day, eagerly awaiting His resurrection they retired to their homes. When Mary Magdalene went to tell His disciples that she had seen the risen Christ, they “believed not” (Mark 16:11). When the two disciples returned from Emmaus and reported unto the others how the Savior had appeared unto them and had walked with them, we are told, “neither believed they them” (Mark 16:13). The testimony of these eyewitnesses seemed to them as idle tales (Luke 24:11). But how is this to be explained? How can we account for the persistent unbelief of these disciples? Ah, is not the answer to be found in the Lord's teaching in the Parable of the Sower? Does He not there warn us, that the great Enemy of souls comes and catches away the “seed” sown! And this is what had taken place with these disciples. They had heard the

Savior say He would raise up the temple of His body in three days, but instead of treasuring up this precious promise in their hearts, and being comforted by it, they had, through their unbelief, allowed the Devil to snatch it away. Their unbelief, we say, for in verse 22 we are told, “When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said.” It was not until after He had risen that they “remembered” and “believed” the word which Jesus had said. And what was it that enabled them to “remember” it then? Ah, do we not recall what Christ had said to them on the eve of His crucifixion,

“But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, 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” (John 14:26).

What a striking and beautiful illustration of this is given us here in John 2:22!

8. “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast, 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” (John 2:23, 24). What a word is this! How it evidences human depravity! Fallen man is a creature that God will not trust. In Eden Adam showed that man after the flesh is not to be trusted. The Law had proved him still unworthy of the confidence of God. And now this same character is stamped upon him by the Lord Jesus Himself. As another has said, “Man’s affections may be stirred, man’s intelligence informed, man’s conscience convicted; but still God cannot trust him.” (J. E. B.). Man in the flesh is condemned. Only a new creation avails before God. Man must be “born again.”

9. “Jesus did not *commit himself* unto them” (verse 24). The Lord’s example here is a warning for us. We do well to remember that all is not gold that glitters. It is not wise to trust in appearances of friendliness on short acquaintance. The discreet man will be kind to all, but intimate with few. The late Bishop Ryle has some practical counsels to offer on this point. Among other things he said, “Learn not to place yourself rashly in the power of others. Study to develop a wise and a happy moderation between universal suspiciousness

and that of making yourself the sport and prey of every pretender and hypocrite.”

10. “Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all, and needed not that any should testify of man: *for he knew what was in man*” (John 2:24, 25). Here we are shown the Savior’s perfect knowledge of the human heart. These men could not impose upon the Son of God. He knew that they were only “stony ground” hearers, and therefore, not to be depended upon. They were only intellectually convinced. Our Lord clearly discerned this. He knew that their profession was not from the heart. And reading thus their hearts He manifested His omniscience. The force of what is said in these closing words of John 2 will be made more evident if we compare them with 1 Kings 8:39: “Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling- place, and forgive whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of all men.)”

It only remains for us to point out how that there is a series of most striking contrasts between the two incidents recorded in the first and second parts of this chapter — the making of water into wine at the Cana marriage-feast, and the cleansing of the Temple.

1. In the one we have a festive gathering; in the other a scene of Divine judgment.
2. To the former the Lord Jesus was invited; in the latter He took the initiative Himself.
3. In the former case He employed human instruments; in the latter He acted all alone.
4. In the former He supplied the wine; in the latter He emptied the temple.
5. In the former, His fact of making the wine was commended; in the cleansing of the temple, He was challenged.
6. In the former Christ pointed forward to His death (John 2:4); in the latter He pointed forward to His resurrection (John 2:19, 21).
7. In the former He “manifested forth his glory” (John 2:11); in the latter He manifested His “zeal” for His Father’s House (John 2:17).

Let the student prayerfully study and meditate upon the following questions in preparation for the next lesson, when we shall give an exposition of the first portion of John 3.

1. Why is Nicodemus referred to in this connection? verse 1.
2. Why are we told he came to Jesus “by night?” verse 2.
3. Was Nicodemus’ conclusion justifiable? verse 2.
4. Why cannot a man “see” the kingdom of God except he be “born again?” verse 3.
5. What did Nicodemus’ ignorance demonstrate? verse 4.
6. What does “born of water” mean? verse 5.
7. In what other ways is the blowing of the Wind analogous with the activities of the Holy Spirit in regeneration? verse 8.

# JOHN 3:1-8

## CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

We begin with the usual Analysis of the passage that is to be before us: —

1. The Person of Nicodemus, verse 1.
2. The official Position of Nicodemus, verse 1.
3. The Timidity of Nicodemus, verse 2.
4. The Reasoning of Nicodemus, verse 2.
5. What did Nicodemus' ignorance demonstrate? verse 4.
6. The Stupidity of Nicodemus, verse 4.
7. The Instructing of Nicodemus, verses 5-8.

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 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 (John 3:1, 2). Nicodemus was a “ruler of the Jews,” which means, most probably, that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. As such, he is to be viewed here as a representative character. He gives us another phase of the spiritual condition of Judaism. First, he came to Jesus “by night” (verse 2); second, he was altogether lacking in spiritual discernment (verses 4, 10); third, he was dead in trespasses and sin, and therefore, needing to be “born again” (verse 7). As such, he was a true representative of the Sanhedrin — Israel’s highest ecclesiastical court. What a picture, then, does this give us again of Judaism! For the Sanhedrin it was *nighttime*, they were in the dark. And like Nicodemus, their representative, the Sanhedrin were devoid of all spiritual discernment, and had no understanding in the things of God. So, too, like Nicodemus, his fellow — members were destitute of spiritual apprehension. Again we say, What light does this cast upon Judaism at that time! So far, we have seen a *blinded* priesthood (John 1:21, 26); second, a *joyless* nation (John 2:3); third, a *desecrated* Temple (John 2:16); and now we have a *spiritually* dead Sanhedrim “The same came to Jesus by night.” And *why* did Nicodemus come to the Lord Jesus by night? Was it because he was ashamed to be seen coming to Him? Did he approach Christ secretly,

under cover of the darkness? This is the view generally held, and we believe it to be the correct one. Why else should we be told that he came “by night?” What seems to confirm the popular idea is that each time Nicodemus is referred to in the Gospel afterwards, it is repeated that he came to Jesus “by night.” In John 7:50, 51 we read, “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?” And again in John 19:39 we are told,

“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight.”

What is the more noticeable is that something courageous is recorded of Nicodemus: his boldness in reprimanding the Sanhedrin, and his intrepidity in accompanying Joseph of Arimathea at a time when all the apostles had fled. It seems as though the Holy Spirit had emphasized these bold acts of Nicodemus by reminding us that at first he acted timidly. One other thing which appears to confirm our conclusion is his use of the personal pronoun when Nicodemus first addressed the Savior: “Rabbi,” he said, “we know that thou art a teacher come from God.” Why speak in the plural number unless he hesitated to commit himself by expressing *his own opinion*? and so preferred to shelter behind the conclusion drawn by others, hence the “we.”

“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” (John 3:2).

This was true, for the miracles of Christ differed radically from those performed by others before or since. But this very fact warns us that we need to examine carefully the credentials of other miracle-workers. Is the fact that a man works miracles a sure proof that he comes from God, and that God is with him? To some the question may appear well-nigh superfluous. There are many who would promptly answer in the affirmative. How could any man perform miracles “except God be with him?” It is because this superficial reasoning prevails so widely that we feel it incumbent upon us to dwell upon this point. And it is because there are men and

women today that work miracles, who (we are fully persuaded) *are not* “sent of God,” that a further word on the subject is much needed.

In these times men and women can stand up and teach the most erroneous doctrines, and yet if they proffer as their credentials the power to perform miracles of healing, they are widely received and hailed as the servants of God. But it is generally overlooked that Satan has the power to work miracles, too, and frequently the great Deceiver of souls bestows this power on his emissaries in order to beguile the unstable and confirm them in error. Let us not forget that the magicians of Egypt were able, up to a certain point, to duplicate the miracles of Moses, and whence obtained they this power unless from that old Serpent, the Devil! Let us not forget the warning of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14,

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

And, finally, let us not forget it is recorded in Scripture that of the Antichrist it is written,

“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Yes, Satan is able to work miracles, and also to deliver this power to others. So, then, the mere fact that a certain teacher works miracles is no proof that he is “come from God.”

It is because we are in danger of being beguiled by these “deceitful workers” of Satan, who “transform themselves into the apostles of Christ,” that we are exhorted to

“believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”  
(1 John 4:1).

And it should not be forgotten that the church at Ephesus was commended by Christ because they had heeded this exhortation, and in consequence had

“tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Revelation 2:2).

“But,” it will be asked, “how are we to test those who come unto us in the name of Christ?” A most important and timely question. We answer, Not by the personal character of those who claim to come from God, for as 2 Corinthians 11:14, 15 tells us,

“Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.”

And not by their power to work miracles. How then? Here is the Divinely inspired answer,

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

They must be tested by the written Word of God. Does the professed servant of God teach that which is in accord with the Holy Scriptures? Does he furnish a “Thus saith the Lord” for every assertion he makes? If he does not, no matter how winsome may be his personality, nor how pleasing his ways, no matter how marvelous may be the “results” he “gets,” God’s command is,

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (this teaching), receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed” (2 John 10).

Let us emulate the Bereans, of whom it is recorded in Acts 17:11, “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

And how did the Lord receive Nicodemus? Notice, He did not refuse him an audience. It was night-time, and no doubt the Savior had put in a full day, yet He did not seek to be excused. Blessed be His name, there is no unacceptable time for a sinner to seek the Savior. Night-time it was, but Christ readily received Nicodemus. One of the things which impresses the writer as he reads the Gospels, is the blessed *accessibility* of the Lord Jesus. He did not

surround Himself with a bodyguard of attendants, whose duty it was to insure his privacy and protect Him from those who could be a nuisance. No; He was easily reached, and blessedly approachable — quite unlike some “great” preachers we know of.

And what was Christ’s response to Nicodemus’ address? This “ruler of the Jews” hailed Him as “a teacher come from God,” and such is the only conception of the Christ of God. But it is not as a Teacher the sinner must first approach Christ. What the sinner needs is to be “born again,” and in order to do this he must have a Savior. And it is of these very things our Lord speaks to Nicodemus — see verses 3 and 14. Of what value is teaching to one who is “dead in trespasses and sins,” and who is even now, under the condemnation of a holy God! A saved person is a fit subject for teaching, but what the unsaved need is preaching, preaching which will expose their depravity, exhibit their deep need of a Savior, and then (and not till then) reveal the One who is mighty to save.

Christ ignored Nicodemus’ address, and with startling abruptness said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This brings us to the central truth of the passage before us — the teaching of our Lord upon the new birth. Here we find that He speaks of first, the supreme Importance of the new birth (verse 3); second, the Instrument of the new birth — “water” (verse 5); third, the Producer of the new birth — “the Spirit” (verse 5); fourth, the imperative Necessity of the new birth — a new nature, “spirit” (verse 6); sixth, the obvious Imperativeness of the new birth (verse 7); seventh, the Process of the new birth (verse 8). Let us consider each of these points separately.

1. The supreme *Importance* of the new birth. This is exhibited here in a number of ways. To begin with, it is profoundly significant that the new birth formed the first subject of the Savior’s teaching in this Gospel. In the first two chapters we learn of a number of things He did, but here in John 3 is the first discourse of Christ recorded by this apostle. It is not how man should live that we are first instructed by Christ in this Gospel, but how men are *made alive* spiritually. A man cannot live before he is born; nor can a dead man regulate his life. No man can live Godwards until he has been born again. The importance of the new birth, then, is shown here, in that the Savior’s

instruction upon it is placed at the beginning of His teaching in this Gospel. Thus we are taught it is of basic, fundamental importance.

In the second place, the *importance* of the new birth is declared by the solemn terms in which Christ spoke of it, and particularly in the manner in which He prefaced His teaching upon it. The Lord began by saying, “Verily, verily,” which means “Of a truth, of a truth.” This expression is employed by Christ only when He was about to mention something of a momentous nature. The double “verily” denoted that what He was about to say was of solemn and weighty significance. Let the reader learn to pay special attention to what follows these “Verily, verily’s” of the Savior, found only in John.

In the third place, Christ here plainly intimated the supreme importance of the new birth by affirming that “Except a man be born again, he *cannot* see the kingdom of God” (verse 3). If then the kingdom of God cannot be seen until a man is born again, the new birth is shown to be a matter of vital moment for every descendant of Adam.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

There is some doubt in our mind as to exactly what is referred to here by “the kingdom of God.” In the first place, this expression occurs nowhere else in this Gospel but here in John 3:3, 5. In the second place, this fourth Gospel treats of spiritual things. For this reason we think “the kingdom of God” in this passage has a moral force. It seems to us that Romans 14:17 helps us to understand the significance of the term we are here studying. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” In the third place, the kingdom of God could not be “seen” by Nicodemus except by the new birth. We take it, then, that the “kingdom of God” in John 3 refers to the things of God, spiritual things, which are discerned and enjoyed by the regenerate here upon earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10, 14). The word for “see” in the Greek is “*eidon*,” which means “to know or become acquainted with.” The full force, then, of this first word of Christ to Nicodemus appears to be this: “Except a man be born again he cannot come to know the things of God.” Such being the case, the new birth is seen to be a thing of profound importance.

“Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4).

What a verification was this of what the Lord had just told Nicodemus. Here was proof positive that this ruler of the Jews was altogether lacking in spiritual discernment, and quite unable to know the things of God. The Savior had expressed Himself in simple terms, and yet this master of Israel altogether missed His meaning. How true it is that

“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),

and in order to have spiritual discernment a man must be born again. Till then he is blind, unable to *see* the things of God.

2. The *Instrument* of the new birth. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (verse 5). Regeneration is a being born “of water.” This expression has been the occasion of wide difference of opinion among theologians. Ritualists have seized upon it as affording proof of their doctrine of baptismal regeneration, but this only evidences the weakness of their case when they are obliged to appeal to such for a proof text. However, it may be just as well if we pause here and give the scriptural refutation of this widely held heresy.

That baptism is in no wise essential to salvation, that it does not form one of the conditions which God requires the sinner to meet, is clear from many considerations. First, if baptism be necessary to salvation then no one was saved before the days of John the Baptist, for the Old Testament will be searched from beginning to end without finding a single mention of “baptism.” God, who changes not, has had but one way of salvation since Adam and Eve became sinners in Eden, and if baptism is an indispensable prerequisite to the forgiveness of sins, then all who died from Abel to the time of

Christ are eternally lost. But this is absurd. The Old Testament Scriptures plainly teach otherwise.

In the second place, if baptism be necessary to salvation, then every professing believer who has died during this present dispensation is eternally lost, if he died without being baptized. And this would shut heaven's door upon the repentant thief, as well as all the Quakers and members of the Salvation Army, the vast majority of whom have never been baptized. But this is equally unthinkable.

In the third place, if baptism be necessary to salvation, then we must utterly ignore every passage in God's Word which teaches that salvation is by grace and not of works, that it is a free gift and not bought by anything the sinner does. If baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange that Christ Himself never baptized any one (see John 4:2), for He came to "save his people from their sins." If baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange that the apostle Paul when asked point blank by the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" answered by saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Finally, if baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange the apostle Paul should have written to the Corinthians,

"I thank God I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius"  
(1 Corinthians 1:14).

If then the words of Christ "born of water" have no reference to the waters of baptism, what do they signify? Before replying directly to this question, we must observe how the word "water" is used in other passages in this Gospel. To the woman at the well Christ said,

"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 4:14).

Was this literal "water?" One has but to ask the question to answer it. Clearly, "water" is here used *emblematically*. Again, in John 7:37, 38 we are told,

"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. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living *water*.”

Here, too, the word “water” is not to be understood literally, but emblematically. These passages in John’s Gospel are sufficient to warrant us in giving the word “water” in John 3:5 a figurative meaning.

If then the Lord Jesus used the word “water” emblematically in John 3:5, to what was He referring? We answer, The *Word* of God. *This* is ever the instrument used by God in regeneration. In every other passage where the instrument of the new birth is described, it is *always* the Word of God that is mentioned. In Psalm 119:50 we read, “For Thy word hath *quicken*ed me.” Again, in 1 Corinthians 4:15 we find the apostle saying, “*I have begotten you through the gospel*.” Again, we are told “Of his own will begat he us with (what? — baptism? no but with) the word of truth” (James 1:18). Peter declares, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

The new birth, then, is by the Word of God, and one of the *emblems* of the Word is “*water*.” God employs quite a number of emblems to describe the various characteristics and qualities of His Word. It is likened to a “lamp” (Psalm 119:105) because it illumines. It is likened unto a “hammer” (Jeremiah 23:29) because it breaks up the hard heart. It is likened unto “water” because it cleanses: see Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26: “Born of water” means born of the cleansing and purifying Word of God.

3. The *Producer* of the new birth. “Born of water, and *of the Spirit*” (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit of God is the Begetter, the Word is the “seed” (1 John 3:9) He uses.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

And again,

“It is the *Spirit that quickeneth*; the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

Nothing could be plainer. No sinner is quickened apart from the Word. The order which is followed by God in the new creation is the same He observed in the restoring of the old creation. A beautiful illustration of this is found in Genesis 1. The opening verse refers to the original creation of God. The second verse describes its subsequent condition, after it had been ruined. Between the first two verses of Genesis 1 some terrible calamity intervened — most probably the fall of Satan — and the fair handiwork of God was blasted. The Hebrew of Genesis 1:2 literally reads, “And the earth *became* a desolate waste.” But six days before the creation of Adam, God began the work of restoration, and it is indeed striking to observe the order He followed.

**First**, darkness abode upon “the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2);

**Second**, “And the Spirit of God moved upon (Hebrew ‘brooded over’) the face of the waters”;

**Third**, “And God said, Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3);

**Fourth**, “And there was light.”

The order is exactly the same in the new creation.

**First**, the unregenerate sinner is in darkness, the darkness of spiritual death.

**Second**, the Holy Spirit moves upon, broods over, the conscience and heart of the one He is about to quicken.

**Third**, the Word of God goes forth in power.

**Fourth**, the result is “light” — the sinner is brought out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. The Holy Spirit, then, is the One who produces the new birth.

4. The imperative Necessity of the new birth.

*“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).*

By his first birth man enters this world a sinful creature, and because of this he is estranged from the thrice Holy One. Of the unregenerate

it is said, "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." Unspeakably solemn is this. When Adam and Eve fell they were banished from the Paradise, and each of their children were born outside of Eden. That sin shuts man out from the holy presence of God, was impressively taught to Israel. When Jehovah came down on Sinai to give the Law unto Moses (the mediator), the people were fenced off at the base of the Mount, and were not suffered to pass on pain of death. When Jehovah took up His abode in the midst of the chosen people, He made His dwelling place inside the holy of holies, which was curtained off, and none was allowed to pass through the veil save the high priest, and he but once a year as he entered with the blood of atonement. Man then is *away from God*. He is, in his natural condition, where the prodigal son was — in the far country, away from the father's house — and except he be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is not an arbitrary decree, but the enunciation of an abiding principle. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. And this is the very nature of the case. An unregenerate man who has no relish at all for spiritual things, who is bored by the conversation of believers, who finds the Bible dull and dry, who is a stranger to the throne of grace, would be wretched in heaven. Such a man could not spend eternity in the presence of God. Suppose a fish were taken out of the water, and laid upon a salver of gold; suppose further that the sweetest of flowers surrounded it, and that the air was filled with their fragrance; suppose, too, that the strains of most melodious music fell upon its ears, would that fish be happy and contented? Of course not. And why not? Because it would be out of harmony with its environment; because it would be lacking in capacity to appreciate its surroundings. *Thus* would it be with an unregenerate soul in heaven.

Once more. The new birth is an imperative necessity because the natural man is altogether devoid of spiritual life. It is not that he is ignorant and needs instruction: it is not that he is feeble and needs invigorating: it is not that he is sickly and needs doctoring. His case is far, far worse. He is *dead* in trespasses and sins. This is no poetical figure of speech; it is a solemn reality, little as it is

perceived by the majority of people. The sinner is spiritually lifeless and needs quickening. He is a spiritual corpse, and needs bringing from death unto life. He is a member of the old creation, which is under the curse of God, and unless he is made a new creation in Christ, he will lie under that curse to all eternity. What the natural man needs above everything else is life, Divine life; and as birth is the gateway to life, he *must* be born again, and except he be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. This is final.

5. The *Character* of the new birth. But what is the new birth? Precisely what is it that differentiates a man who is dead in sins from one who has passed from death unto life? Upon this point there is much confusion and ignorance. Tell the average person that he must be born again and he thinks you mean that he must reform, mend his manner of life, turn over a new leaf. But reformation concerns only the outer life. And the trouble with man is within. Suppose the mainspring of my watch were broken, what good would it do if I put in a new crystal and polished the case until I could see my face in it? None at all, for the seat of the trouble is inside the watch. So it is with the sinner. Suppose that his deportment was irreproachable, that his moral character was stainless, that he had such control of his tongue that he never sinned with his lips, what would all this avail while he still had (as God says he has) a heart that is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?” The new birth, then, is something more than reformation.

Others suppose, and there are thousands who do so, that being born again means *becoming religious*. Tell the average church-goer that “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and these solemn words afford him no qualms. He is quite at ease, for he fondly imagines that he has been born again. He will tell you that he has always been a Christian: that from early childhood he has believed in Christianity, has attended church regularly, nay, that he is a church-member, and contributes regularly toward the support of the Gospel. He is very religious. Periodically he has happy feelings; he says his prayers regularly, and on Sundays he reads his Bible. What more can be required of him! And thus many are lulled to sleep by Satan. If such an one should read these lines, let him pause and seriously weigh the fact that it was man eminently *religious* that the Savior was addressing when He declared, “Except a man be born

of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus was not only a religious man, he was a preacher, and yet it was to him Christ said, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, *Ye* must be born again.”

There are still others who believe that the new birth is *a change of heart*, and it is exceedingly difficult to convince them to the contrary. They have heard so many preachers, orthodox preachers, speak of a change of heart, that they have never thought of challenging the scripturalness of this expression, yet it is unscriptural. The Bible may be searched from Genesis to Revelation, and nowhere does this expression “change of heart” occur upon its pages. The sad thing is that “change of heart” is not only unscriptural, but is it antiscritptural, untrue, and therefore, utterly misleading. In the one who has been born again there is no change of heart though there is a change of life, both inward and outward. The one who is born again now loves the things he once bated, and he hates now the things he once loved; and, in consequence, his whole line of conduct is radically affected. But, nevertheless, it remains true that his old heart (which is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”) remains in him, *unchanged*, to the end.

What, then, is the new birth? We answer, It is not the removal of anything from the sinner, nor the changing of anything within the sinner; instead, it is the communication of something to the sinner. The new birth is the impartation of the new nature. When I was born the first time I received from my parents their nature: so, when I was born again, I received from God *His* nature. The Spirit of God begets within us a spiritual nature: as we read in 2 Peter 1:4,

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the *divine nature*.”

It is a fundamental law which inheres in the very nature of things that like can only produce like. This unchanging principle is enunciated again and again in the first chapter of Genesis. There we read,

*“And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind” (John 1:12).*

And again,

*“And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind” (John 1:21).*

It is only the blindness and animus of infidelistic evolutionists who affirm that one order of creatures can beget another order radically different from themselves. No; that which is born of the vegetable is vegetable; that which is born of the animal is animal. And that which is born of sinful man is a sinful child. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Hence, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” It cannot be anything else. Educate and cultivate it all you please, it remains flesh. Water cannot rise above its own level, neither can a bitter fountain send forth sweet waters. That which is born of flesh is flesh; it may be refined flesh, it may be beautiful flesh, it may be religious flesh. But it is still “flesh.” On the other hand, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The child always partakes of the nature of his parents. That which is born of man is human; that which is born of God is Divine. That which is born of man is sinful, that which is born of God is spiritual.

Here, then, is the character or nature of the new birth. It is not the reformation of the outward man, it is not the education of the natural man, it is not the purification of the old man, but it is the creation of a new man. It is a Divine begetting (James 1:18). It is a birth of the Spirit (John 3:6). It is a being made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is becoming a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It is a being born into God’s family. Every born again person has, therefore, two natures within him: one which is carnal, the other which is spiritual. These two natures are contrary the one to the other (Galatians 5:17), and in consequence, there is an unceasing warfare going on within the Christian. It is only the grace of God which can subdue the old nature; and it is only the Word of God which can feed the new nature.

6. The *obvious Imperativeness* of the new birth. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). Without doubt, Nicodemus was startled. The emphatic statements of Christ staggered him. The vital importance and imperative necessity of the new birth were points which had never exercised his conscience or engaged his serious attention. He was amazed at the Savior’s searching declarations. Yet he ought not to have been. Really, there was no cause for him to stand there in openmouthed wonderment. “Marvel not,” said Christ. It was as though the Lord had said, “Nicodemus, what I have said to you should be obvious. If a man is a sinner, if because of sin he is blind to the things of God, if no amount of religious cultivation can change the essential nature of man, then it is *patent* that his deepest need is to be born again. Marvel not: it is a self-evident truth.”

That entrance into the kingdom of God is only made possible by the new birth, that is, by the reception of the Divine nature, follows a basic law that obtains in every other kingdom. The realm of music is entered by birth. Suppose I have a daughter, and I am anxious she should become an accomplished musician. I place her under the tuition of the ablest instructor obtainable. She studies diligently the science of harmony, and she practices assiduously hours every day. In the end, will my desire be realized? Will she become an accomplished musician? That depends upon one thing — was she *born* with a musical nature? Musicians are born, not manufactured. Again; suppose I have a son whom I desire should be an artist. I place him under the instruction of an efficient teacher. He is given lessons in drawing; he studies the laws of color-blending; he is taken to the art galleries and observes the productions of the great masters. And what is the result? Does he blossom out into a talented artist? And again it depends solely on one thing — was he born with the nature and temperament of an artist? Artists are born, not manufactured. Let these examples suffice for illustrating this fundamental principle. A man *must* have a musical nature if he is to enter the kingdom of music. A man *must* have an artistic nature if he is really to enter the realm of art. A man *must* have a mathematical mind if he is to be a mathematician. There is nothing to “marvel” at in this: it is self-evident; it is axiomatic. So, in like manner, a man *must* have a spiritual nature before he can enter the spiritual world: a

man *must* have God's own nature before he can enter God's kingdom. Therefore "Marvel not... ye *must* be born again."

#### 7. The *Process* of the new birth.

"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" (John 3:8).

A comparison is here drawn between the wind and the Spirit. The comparison is a double one. First, both are *sovereign in their activities*; and second, both are *mysterious in their operations*. The comparison is pointed out in the word "so." The first point of analogy is found in the word "where it listeth" or "pleaseth"; the second is found in the words "canst not tell."

"The wind bloweth where it pleaseth... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is *irresponsible*: that is to say, it is sovereign in its action. The wind is an element altogether beyond man's control. The wind neither consults man's pleasure, nor can it be regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows where it pleases, when it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit.

Again; the wind is *irresistible*. When the wind blows in the fulness of its power it sweeps everything before it. Those who have looked upon the effects of a tornado just after it has passed, know something of the mighty force of the wind. It is so with the Spirit. When He comes in the fulness of His power, He breaks down man's prejudices, subdues his rebellious will, overcomes all opposition.

Again; the wind is *irregular*. Sometimes the wind moves so softly it scarcely rustles a leaf, at other times it blows so loudly that its roar can be heard miles away. So it is in the matter of the new birth. With some the Holy Spirit works so gently His work is imperceptible to onlookers; with others His action is so powerful, so radical, revolutionary, His operations are patent to many. Sometimes the wind is only local in its reach, at other times it is widespread in its scope. So it is with the Spirit. Today He acts on one or two souls, tomorrow, He may — as at Pentecost — "prick in the heart" a whole

multitude. But whether He works on few or many He consults not man; He acts as *He* pleases.

Again; the wind is *invisible*. It is one of the very few things in nature that is invisible. We can see the rain, the snow, the lightning's flash; but not so the wind. The analogy holds good with the Spirit. His Person is unseen.

Again; the wind is *inscrutable*. There is something about the wind which defies all effort of human explanation. Its origin, its nature, its activities, are beyond man's ken. Man cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. It is so with the activities of the Holy Spirit. His operations are conducted secretly; His workings are profoundly mysterious.

Again; the wind is *indispensable*. If a dead calm were to continue indefinitely all vegetation would die. How quickly we wilt when there is no wind at all. Even more so is it with the Spirit. Without Him there could be no spiritual life at all.

Finally, the wind is *invigorating*. The life-giving properties of the wind are illustrated every time a physician orders his sick patient to retire to the mountains or to the seaside. It is so, again, with the Spirit. He is the One who strengthens with might in the inner man. He is the One who energizes, revives, empowers.

How marvelously full was the figure employed by Christ on this occasion. How much is suggested by this single word "wind." Let the above serve as an example of the great importance and value of prolonged meditation upon every word of Holy Writ.

God has thrown an impenetrable veil over the beginnings and processes of life. That we live we know, but *how we* live we cannot tell. Life is evident to the consciousness and manifest to the senses, but it is profoundly mysterious in its operations. It is so with the new life born of the Spirit. To sum up the teaching of this verse: "The wind bloweth" — there is the fact. "And thou hearest the sound thereof" — there is evidence of the fact. "But knowest not whence" — there is the mystery behind the fact. The one born again knows that he has a new life, and enjoys the evidences of it, but how the

Holy Spirit operates upon the soul, subdues the will, creates the new life within us, belongs to the deep things of God.

Below will be found a number of questions bearing on the passage which is to be before us in the next chapter. In the meantime let each reader who desires to become a “workman that needeth not to be ashamed” diligently study the whole passage (John 3:9-21) for himself, paying particular attention to the points raised by our questions: — [12](#)

1. What does verse 9 go to prove?
2. What solemn warning does verse 10 point?
3. What is the force of the contrast between earthly things and heavenly things in verse 12?
4. How are we to understand verse 13 in view of Enoch’s and Elijah’s experiences?
5. What Divine attribute of Christ is affirmed in verse 13?
6. What is the connection between verse 14 and the context?
7. Why was a “serpent” selected by God to typify Christ on the Cross? verse 14. Study carefully the first nine verses of Numbers 21.

# JOHN 3:9-21

## CHRIST AND NICODEMUS (CONCLUDED)

We begin with an Analysis of the passage which is before us: —

1. The Dullness of Nicodemus, verses 9, 10.
2. The Unbelief of Nicodemus, verses 11, 12.
3. The Omnipresence of Christ, verse 13.
4. The Necessity of Christ's Death, verses 14, 15.
5. The Unspeakable Gift of God, verse 16.
6. The Purpose of God in sending Christ, verse 17.
7. Grounds of Condemnation, verses 18-21.

In our last chapter we dealt at length with Nicodemus' interview with Christ, and sought to bring out the meaning of our Lord's words on that occasion. We saw how the Savior insisted that the new birth was an imperative *necessity*; that, even though Nicodemus were a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, nevertheless, unless he was born again he could not see the kingdom of God, *i.e.* come to know the things of God. We also saw how the Lord explained the character of the new birth as a being "born of water (the Word) and of the Spirit"; that regeneration was not a process of reformation or the improving of the old man, but the creating of an altogether new man. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and no artifices of men can ever make it anything else. If a sinner is to enter the kingdom of God he must be born again. Finally, we saw how the Savior likened the operations of the Spirit in bringing about the new birth to the sovereign but mysterious action of the wind. The Savior had used great plainness of speech, and one had thought it impossible for an intelligent man to miss His meaning. But observe the next verse.

"Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?" (John 3:9).

How this reveals the natural man! It is true that Nicodemus was an educated man and, doubtless, one of exemplary moral character; but something more than education and morality are needed to understand the things of God. God has spoken plainly, and in simple

terms, yet notwithstanding, the natural man, unaided, has no capacity to receive what God has recorded in His Holy Word. Even though God became incarnate and spoke in human language, men understood Him not. This is demonstrated again and again in this Gospel. Christ spoke of raising the temple of His body, and they thought He referred to the temple standing in Jerusalem. He spoke to the Samaritan woman of the “living water,” and she supposed Him to be referring to the water of Jacob’s well. He told the disciples He had meat to eat they knew not of, and they thought only of material food (John 4:32). He spoke of Himself as the Living Bread come down from heaven which, said He, “is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world,” and the Jews answered, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:51, 52). He declared, “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye cannot come,” and His auditors said,

“Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles?” (John 7:33-35).

Again, He said, “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come”; and the Jews replied,

“Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come” (John 8:21, 22).

He declared, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” and they answered,

“We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how mayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” (John 8:31-33).

And so we might continue through this Gospel. What a commentary upon human intelligence; what a proof of man’s stupidity and blindness!

And Nicodemus was no exception. Master in Israel he might be, yet he was ignorant of the ABC of spiritual things. And why? What is the cause of the natural man’s stupidity? Is it because he is in the dark:

“The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19).

The testimony of the New Testament is equally explicit:

“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” (Ephesians 4:18).

How humbling all this is. How it exposes the folly of the proud boasting of men upon their fancied wisdom and learning! The natural man is in the dark because he is blind. Yet how rarely is this stressed in the modern pulpit. How very rarely do most of the Bible teachers of the day emphasize and press the blindness of natural man, and his deep need of Divine illumination! These things are not palatable we know, and a faithful exposition of them will not make for the popularity of those who preach them: yet are they sorely needed in these days of Laodicean complacency. Let any one who desires to follow the example which our Savior has left us, read through the four Gospels at a sitting, with the one purpose of discovering how large a place He gave in His preaching to the depravity of man, and most probably the reader will be greatly surprised.

“How can these things be?” Nicodemus was at least honest. He was not ashamed to own his ignorance, and ask questions. Well for many another if they would do likewise. Too many are kept in ignorance by a foolish pride which scorns to take the place of one seeking light. Yet this is one of the prime requirements in any who desire to learn. It applies as much to the believer as to the unbeliever. If the Christian refuses to humble himself, if he disdains the attitude of “What I see not, teach thou me” (Job 34:32); if he is unwilling to receive instruction from those taught of God, and above all, if he fails to cry daily to God

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18),

he will not, and cannot, grow in the knowledge of the truth.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:10).

It is to be noted that our Lord here employed the same term in interrogating Nicodemus as this ruler of the Jews used at the beginning when addressing Christ, for in the Greek the word for “teacher” in verse 2 is the same as the one rendered “master” in verse 10. It is exceedingly striking to observe that in the brief record of this interview we find the Lord employing just seven times the very expression used by Nicodemus himself. We tabulate them thus:

1. Nicodemus declared, “We *know*,” verse 2. Christ said, “That which we know we speak” (Gk.), verse 11.
2. Nicodemus said, “*Thou art a teacher*,” verse 2. Christ said, “*Art thou a teacher?*” verse 10.
3. Nicodemus said, “*Except God be with him*,” verse 2. Christ said, “*Except a man be*,” verse 3.
4. Nicodemus asked, “How can a *man be born?*” verse 4. Christ answered, “*Except a man be born*,” verse 5.
5. Nicodemus asked, “*Can he enter?*” verse 4. Christ answered, “*He cannot enter*,” verse 5.
6. Nicodemus asked, “*How can?*” verse 9. Christ asked, “*How shall?*” verse 12.
7. Nicodemus asked, “How can *these things* be?” verse 9. Christ asked, “knowest not *these things?*” verse 10.

It is really startling to behold this remarkable correspondency between the language of Nicodemus and the words of the Savior, and surely there is some important lesson to be learned from it. What are we to gather from this employment by Christ of the terms first used by Nicodemus? Does it not illustrate a principle and teach a lesson for all Christian workers? Let us state it this way: Christ met this man on his own ground, and made his own language the channel of approach to his heart. How simple, yet how important. Have we not often been puzzled to know how to approach some person in whose soul we were interested? We wondered just where was the place to begin. Well, here is light on the problem. Make his own utterances the starting point of your address. Turn his own words around against him, and whenever possible, invest them with a deeper meaning and a higher application.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” What a rebuke this was! It was as though the Lord had said, “You a teacher, and yet untaught yourself? You a lightholder, and yet in the dark! You a master of Israel, and yet ignorant of the most elementary spiritual truths!” How searching, and how solemn! To what extent is this true of the writer and the reader? Ah, must we not all of us hang our heads in shame? How little we know of what we ought to know. How blind we are! So blind that we need to be *guided* into the truth (John 16:13)! Is not our sorest need that of going to the great Physician and seeking from Him that spiritual “eyesalve,” so that He may anoint our eyes that we can see (Revelation 3:18)? God forbid that the haughtiness of Laodicean-ism should prevent us.

Ere passing on to the next verse let us point out one more lesson from that now before us — verse 10. Even a religious teacher may be ignorant of Divine truth. What a solemn warning is this for us to put no confidence in any man. Here was a member of the Sanhedrin, trained in the highest theological school of his day, and yet having no discernment of spiritual things. Unfortunately he has had many successors. The fact that a preacher has graduated with honors from some theological center is no proof that he is a man taught of the Holy Spirit. No dependence can be placed on human learning. The only safe course is to emulate the Bereans, and bring everything we hear from the platform and pulpit, yes, and everything we read in religious magazines, to the test of the Word of God, rejecting everything which is not clearly taught in the Holy Oracles.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness” (John 3:11).

As pointed out above, this was Christ’s reply to what Nicodemus had said in his opening statement. “We know that thou art a teacher come from God” declared this representative of the Sanhedrin. In response, our Lord now says, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” At a later stage in the conversation, Nicodemus had asked, “How can these things be?” (verse 9). What Christ had said concerning the new birth had struck this ruler of the

Jews as being incredible. Hence this solemn and emphatic declaration — “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” Christ was not dealing with metaphysical speculations or theological hypotheses, such as the Jewish doctors delighted in. Instead, He was affirming that which He knew to be a Divine reality, and testifying to that which had an actual existence and could be seen and observed.

What an example does our Lord set before all His servants! The teacher of God’s Word must not attempt to expound what is not already clear to himself, still less must he speculate upon Divine things, or speak of that of which he has no experimental acquaintance. Bather must he speak of that which he knows and testify to that which he has seen.

“And ye receive not our witness.” There is an obvious connection between this statement and what is recorded in the previous verse. There we find Christ chiding Nicodemus for his ignorance of Divine truth; here He reveals the cause of such ignorance. The reason a man does not know the things of God, is because he receives not God’s witness concerning them. It is vitally important to observe this order. First receiving, then knowledge: first believing what God has said, and then an understanding of it. This principle is illustrated in Hebrews 11:3 — “Through faith we understand.” This is the first thing predicated of faith in that wonderful faith chapter. Faith is the root of perception. As we believe God’s Word, He honors our faith by giving us a knowledge of what we have believed. And, if we believe not His Word we shall have no understanding whatever of Divine things.

“If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

This is closely connected with the previous verse. There, the Lord Jesus lays bare the cause of man’s ignorance in the things of God; here He reveals the condition of growth in knowledge. God’s law in the spiritual realm corresponds with that which operates in the natural world: there is first the blade, then the ear, and last the full corn in the ear. God will not reveal to us a higher truth until we have thoroughly apprehended the simpler ones first. This, we take it, is the moral principle that Christ here enunciated. “Earthly things” are

evident and in measure comprehensible, but “heavenly things” are invisible and altogether beyond our grasp until Divinely revealed to us. As to the local or immediate reference, we understand by the “earthly things” the new birth which takes place here upon earth, and the Lord’s reference to the “wind” as an illustration of the Spirit’s operations in bringing about the new birth. These were things that Nicodemus ought to have known about from Ezekiel 36:25-27. If, then, Nicodemus believed not God’s Word concerning these earthly things, of what avail would it be for Christ to speak to him of “heavenly things?” We pause to apply this searching principle to ourselves.

Why is it that our progress is so slow in the things of God? What is it that retards our growth in the knowledge of the truth? Is not the answer to these and all similar questions stated above: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?” The earthly things are things pertaining to the earthly realm. They are the things which have to do with our present life here upon earth. They are the commands of God which are for the regulation of our daily walk down here. If we believe not these, that is, if we do not appropriate them and submit ourselves to them, if we do not receive and heed them, then will God reveal to us the higher mysteries — the “heavenly things?” No, indeed, for that would be setting a premium on our unbelief, and casting pearls before swine.

Why is it that we have so little light on many of the prophetic portions of Scripture? Why is it that we know so little of the conditions of those who are now “present with the Lord?” Why is it that we are so ignorant of what will form our occupation in the eternal state? Is it because the prophecies are obscure? Is it because God has revealed so little about the intermediate and eternal states? Surely not. It is because we are in no condition to receive illumination upon these things. Because we have paid so little earnest heed to the “earthly things” (the things pertaining to our earthly life, the precepts of God for the regulation of our earthly walk) God withholds from us a better knowledge of “heavenly things,” things pertaining to the heavenly realm. Let writer and reader bow before God in humble and contrite confession for our miserable failures, and seek from Him that needed grace that our

ways may be more pleasing in His sight. Let our first desire be, not a clearer apprehension of the Divine mysteries, but a more implicit obedience to the Divine requirements. As we turn to God's Word, let our dominant motive be that we may learn God's mind *for us* in order that we may do it, and not that we may become wise in recondite problems. Let us remember that "strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses (spiritual senses) *exercised* to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

["And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" \(John 3:13\).](#)

The connection between this verse and the preceding one seems to be as follows. The "heavenly things" to which the Lord had referred had not till then been clearly revealed to men. To ascend to heaven, and penetrate the hidden counsels of God, was an utter impossibility to fallen man. Only the Son, whose native residence was heaven, was *qualified* to reveal heavenly things.

But what did the Lord mean when He said, "*No man* hath ascended up to heaven?" This verse is a favorite one with many of those who believe in "Soul Sleep" and "Annihilation." There are those who contend that between death and resurrection man ceases to be. They appeal to this verse and declare it teaches no man, not even Abel or David, has yet gone to heaven. But it is to be noted that Christ did not say, "no man hath entered heaven," but, "no man hath *ascended* up to heaven." This is an entirely different thing. "Ascended" no man had, or ever will. What is before us now is only one of ten thousand examples of the minute and marvelous accuracy of Scripture, lost, alas, on the great majority who read it so carelessly and hurriedly. Of Enoch it is recorded that he "was translated that he should not see death" (Hebrews 11:5). Of Elijah it is said that he "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11). Of the saints who shall be raptured to heaven at the return of Christ, it is said that they shall be "*caught up*" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Of Christ alone is it said that He "*ascended*." This at once marks His uniqueness, and demonstrates that in all things He has "the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

But observe further that the Lord said, “even the Son of man which is in heaven.” In heaven, even while speaking to Nicodemus on earth. This is another evidence of His Deity. It affirmed His Omnipresence. It is remarkable to see that every essential attribute of Deity is predicated of Christ in this Gospel, the special object of which is to unveil His Divine perfections. His eternity is argued in John 1:1. His Divine glory is mentioned in John 1:14. His omniscience is seen in John 1:48 and again in John 2:24, 25. His matchless wisdom is borne witness to in John 7:46. His unchanging love is affirmed in John 13:1. And so we might go on indefinitely.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14).

Christ had been speaking to Nicodemus about the imperative necessity of the new birth. By nature man is dead in trespasses and sins, and in order to obtain life he must be born again. The new birth is the impartation of Divine life, eternal life, but for this to be bestowed on men, the Son of man must be lifted up. Life could come only out of death. The sacrificial work of Christ is the basis of the Spirit’s operations and the ground of God’s gift of eternal life. Observe that Christ here speaks of the lifting up of the Son of man, for atonement could be made only by One in the nature of him who sinned, and only as Man was God’s Son capable of taking upon Him the penalty resting on the sinner. No doubt there was a specific reason why Christ should here refer to His sacrificial death as a “lifting up.” The Jews were looking for a Messiah who should be lifted up, but elevated in a manner altogether different from what the Lord here mentions. They expected Him to be elevated to the throne of David, but before this He must be lifted up upon the Cross of shame, enduring the judgment of God upon His people’s sin.

To illustrate the character, the meaning, and the purpose of His death, the Lord here refers to the well-known incident in Israel’s wilderness wanderings which is recorded in Numbers 21. Israel was murmuring against the Lord, and He sent fiery serpents among the people, which bit them so that some of the people died and many others were sorely wounded from their poisonous bites. In consequence, they confessed they had sinned, and cried unto Moses

for relief. He, in turn, cried unto God, and the Lord bade him make a serpent of brass, fix it on a pole, and tell the bitten Israelites to look to it in faith and they should be healed. All of this was a striking foreshadowing of Christ being lifted up on the Cross in order that He might save, through the look of faith, those who were dying from sin. The type is a remarkable one and worthy of our closest study.

A “serpent” was a most appropriate figure of that deadly and destructive power, the origin of which the Scriptures teach us to trace to the Serpent, whose “seed” sinners are declared to be. The poison of the serpent’s bite, which vitiates the entire system of its victim, and from the fatal effects of which there was no deliverance, save that which God provided, strikingly exhibited the awful nature and consequences of sin. The remedy which God provided was the exhibition of the destroyer destroyed. Why was not one of the actual serpents spiked by Moses to the pole? Ah, that would have marred the type: that would have pictured judgment executed on the sinner himself; and, worse still, would have misrepresented our sinless Substitute. In the type chosen there was the likeness of a serpent, not an actual serpent, but a piece of brass made like one. So, the One who is the sinners Savior was sent “in the likeness of sin’s flesh” (Romans 8:3, Gk.), and God

“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).

But how could a serpent fitly typify the Holy One of God? This is the very last thing of all we had supposed could, with any propriety, be a figure of Him. True, the “serpent” did not, could not, typify Him in His essential character, and perfect life. The brazen serpent only foreshadowed Christ as He was “lifted up.” The lifting up manifestly pointed to the Cross. What was the “serpent?” It was the reminder and emblem of the curse. It was through the agency of that old Serpent, the Devil, that our first parents were seduced, and brought under the curse of a Holy God. And on the cross, dear reader, the holy One of God, incarnate, was made a curse for us. We would not dare make such an assertion, did not Scripture itself expressly affirm it. In Galatians 3:13 we are told, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”

There was no flaw, then, in the type. The foreshadowing was perfect. A “serpent” was the only thing in all nature which could accurately prefigure the crucified Savior made a curse for us.

But why a “serpent” of brass? That only brings out once more the perfect accuracy of the type. “Brass” speaks of two things. In the symbolism of Scripture brass is the emblem of Divine *judgment*. The *brazen* altar illustrates this truth, for on it the sacrificial animals were slain, and upon it descended the consuming fire from heaven. Again; in Deuteronomy 28, the Lord declared unto Israel, that if they would not hearken unto His voice and do His commandments (verse 15), that His curse should come upon them (verse 16), and as a part of the Divine judgment with which they should be visited, He warned them, “Thy heaven that is above thy head shall be *brass*” (verse 23). Once more, in Revelation 1, where Christ is seen as Judge, inspecting the seven churches we are told, “His feet were like fine brass” (verse 15). The “serpent,” then, spoke of the curse which sin entailed; the “brass” told of God’s judgment falling on the One made sin for us. But there is another thought suggested by the brass. Brass is harder than iron, or silver or gold. It told, then, of Christ’s mighty strength, which was able to endure the awful judgment which fell upon Him — a mere creature, though sinless, would have been utterly consumed.

From what has been said, it will be evident that when God told Moses to make a serpent of brass, fix it upon a pole, and bid the bitten Israelites look on it and they should live, that He was preaching to them the Gospel of His grace. We would now point out seven things which these Israelites were *not bidden* to do.

1. They were not told to *manufacture some ointment* as the means of healing their wounds. Doubtless, that would have seemed much more reasonable to them. But it would have destroyed the type. The religious doctors of the day are busy inventing spiritual lotions, but they effect no cures. Those who seek spiritual relief by such means are like the poor woman mentioned in the Gospel: she

“suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse”  
(Mark 5:26).

2. They were not told to *minister to others* who were wounded, in order to get relief for themselves. This, too, would have appealed to their sentiments as being more practical and more desirable than gazing at a pole, yet in fact it had been most impracticable. Of what use would it be for one to jump into deep water to rescue a drowning man if he could not swim a stroke himself! How then can one who is dying and unable to deliver himself, help others in a similar state. And yet there are many today engaged in works of charity with the vain expectation that giving relief to others will counteract the deadly virus of sin which is at work in their own souls.

3. They were not told to *fight the serpents*. If some of our moderns had been present that day they would have urged Moses to organize a Society for the Extermination of Serpents! But of what use had that been to those who were *already* bitten and dying? Had each stricken one killed a thousand serpents they would still have died. And what does all this fighting sin amount to! True, it affords an outlet for the energy of the flesh; but all these crusades against intemperance, profanity and vice, have not improved society any, nor have they brought a single sinner one step nearer to Christ.

4. They were not told to make an *offering to the serpent* on the pole. God did not ask any payment from them in return for their healing. No, indeed. Grace ceases to be grace if any price is paid for what it brings. But how frequently is the Gospel perverted at this very point! Not long ago the writer preached on human depravity, addressing himself exclusively to the unsaved. He sought by God's help to show the unbeliever the terribleness of his state and how desperate was his need of a Savior to deliver him from the wrath to come. As we took our seat, the pastor of the church rose and announced an irrelevant hymn and then urged everybody present to "re- consecrate themselves to God." Poor man! That was the best he knew. But what pitiful blindness! Other preachers are asking their hearers to "Give their hearts to Jesus"- another miserable perversion. God does not ask the sinner to give anything, but to *Receive HIS CHRIST*.

5. They were not told to *pray* to the serpent. Many evangelists urge their hearers to go to the mourners bench or penitent form" and there

plead with God for pardoning mercy, and if they are dead in earnest they are led to believe that God has heard them for their much speaking. If these “seekers after a better life” believe what the preacher has told them, namely, that they have “prayed through” and have now “got forgiveness,” they feel happy, and for a while continue treading the clean side of the Broad Road with a light heart; but the almost invariable consequence is that their last state is worse than the first. O dear reader, do not make the fatal mistake of substituting prayer for faith in Christ.

6. They were told not to *look at Moses*. They had been looking to Moses, and urging him to cry to God on their behalf; and when God responded, He took their eyes from off Moses, and commanded them to look at the brazen serpent. Moses was the Law-giver, and how many today are looking to him for salvation. They are trusting in their own imperfect obedience to God’s commandments to take them to heaven. In other words, they are depending on their own works. But Scripture says emphatically,

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5).

The Law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth* came by Jesus Christ, and Christ alone can save.

7. They were not told to look at *their wounds*. Some think they need to be more occupied with the work of examining their own wicked hearts in order to promote that degree of repentance which they deem a necessary qualification for salvation. But as well attempt to produce heat by looking, at the snow, or light by peering into the darkness, as seek salvation by looking to self for it. To be occupied with myself is only to be taken up with that which God has condemned, and which already has the sentence of death written upon it. But, it may be asked, “Ought I not to have that godly sorrow which worketh repentance before I trust in Christ?” Certainly not. You cannot have a godly sorrow till you are a godly person, and you cannot be a godly person until you have submitted yourself to God and obeyed Him by believing in Christ. *Faith* is the beginning of all godliness.

We have developed the seven points above with the purpose of exposing some of the wiles by which the Enemy is deceiving a multitude of souls. It is greatly to be feared that there are many in our churches today who sincerely think they are Christians, but who are sincerely mistaken. Believing that I am a millionaire will not make me one; and believing that I am saved, when I am not, will not save me. The Devil is well pleased if he can get the awakened sinner to look at anything rather than Christ — good works, repentance, feelings, resolutions, baptism, anything so long as it is not Christ Himself.

Turning now from the negative to the positive side, let us consider, though it must be briefly, one or two points in the type itself. First, Moses was commanded by God to make a serpent of brass — *it was of the Lord's providing* — and the spiritual significance of this we have already looked at. Second, Moses was commanded to fix this brazen serpent upon a pole. Thus was the Divine remedy *publicly* exhibited so that all Israel might look on it and be healed. Third, the Lord's promise was that

[“it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” \(Numbers 21:8\).](#)

Thus, not only did God here give a foreshadowing of the means by which salvation was to be brought out for sinners, but also the manner in which the sinner obtains an interest in that salvation, namely, *by looking away from himself to the Divinely appointed object of faith*, even to the Lord Jesus Christ. How blessed this was: the brazen serpent was “lifted up” so that those who were too weak to crawl up to the pole itself, and perhaps too far gone to even raise their voices in supplication could, nevertheless, lift up their eyes in simple faith in God's promise and be healed.

Just as the bitten Israelites were healed by a look of faith, so the sinner may be saved by looking to Christ by faith. Saving faith is not some difficult and meritorious work which man must perform so as to give him a claim upon God for the blessing of salvation. It is not on account of our faith that God saves us, but it is through the means of our faith. It is in believing we are saved. It is like saying to a starving man, He that eats of this food shall be relieved from the pangs of hunger, and be refreshed and strengthened. Eating is no

meritorious performance, but, from the nature of things, eating is the indispensable means of relieving hunger. To say that when a man believes he shall be saved, is just to say that the guiltiest of the guilty, and the vilest of the vile, is welcome to salvation, if he will but receive it in the only way in which, from the nature of the case, it can be received, namely, by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which means believing what God has recorded concerning His Son in the Holy Scriptures. The moment a sinner does that he is saved, just as God said to Moses, "It shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."

"*Every one* that is bitten." No matter how many times he may have been bitten; no matter how far the poison had advanced in its progress toward a fatal issue, if he but looked he should "live." Such is the Gospel declaration: "*whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is no exception. The vilest wretch on the face of the earth, the most degraded and despised, the most miserable and wretched of all human kind, who believes in Christ shall be saved by Him with an everlasting salvation. Not sin but unbelief can bar the sinner's way to the Savior. It is possible that some of the Israelites who heard of the Divinely appointed remedy made light of it; it may be that some of them cherished wicked doubts as to the possibility of them obtaining any relief by looking at a brazen serpent; some may have hoped for recovery by the use of ordinary means; no matter, if these things were true of them, and later they found the disease gaining on them, and then they lifted up a believing eye to the Divinely erected standard, they too were healed. And should these lines be read by one who has long procrastinated, who has continued for many long years in a course of stout-hearted unbelief and impenitence, nevertheless, the marvelous grace of our God declares to you, that "*whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is still the "accepted time"; it is still "the day of salvation." Believe now, and thou shalt be saved.

Man became a lost sinner by a *look*, for the first thing recorded of Eve in connection with the fall of our first parents is that "The woman saw that the tree was good for food" (Genesis 3:6) In like manner, the lost sinner is saved by a look. The Christian life begins by looking:

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

The Christian life continues by looking:

“let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

And at the end of the Christian life we “re still to be looking for Christ:

“For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

From first to last, the one thing required is looking at God’s Son.

But perhaps right here the troubled and trembling sinner will voice his last difficulty — “Sir, I do not know that I am looking in the correct way.” Dear friend, God does not ask you to look at your look, but at CHRIST. In that great crowd of bitten Israelites of old there were some with young eyes and some with old eyes that looked at the serpent; there were some with clear vision and some with dim vision; there were some who had a full view of the serpent by reason of their nearness to the uplifted type of Christ; and there were, most probably, others who could scarcely see it because of their great distance from the pole, but the Divine record is “It shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” And so it is today. The Lord Jesus says, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He does not define the method or the manner of coming, and even if the poor sinner comes groping, stumbling, falling, yet if only he will “come” there is a warm welcome for him. So it is in our text: it is “whosoever believeth” — nothing is said about the strength or the intelligence of the belief, for it is not the character or degree of faith that saves, but Christ Himself. Faith is simply the eye of the soul that looks off unto the Lord Jesus, Do not rest, then, on your faith, but on the Savior Himself.

“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 3:16).

Christ had just made mention of His death, and had affirmed that the Cross was an imperative necessity; it was not “the Son of man shall be lifted up,” but “the Son of man must be lifted up.” There was no other alternative. If the claims of God’s throne were to be met, if the demands of justice were to be satisfied, if the sin was to be put away, it could only be by some sinless One being punished in the stead of those who should be saved. The righteousness of God required this: the Son of man *must* be lifted up.

But there is more in the Cross of Christ than an exhibition of the righteousness of God; there is also a display of His wondrous *love*. Verse 16 explains verse 14, as its opening word indicates. Verse 16 takes us back to the very foundation of everything. The great Sacrifice was provided by Love. Christ was God’s love-gift. This at once refutes an error that once obtained in certain quarters, namely, that Christ died in order that God might be induced to pity and save men. The very opposite is the truth. Christ died because God did love men, and was determined to save them that believe. The death of Christ was the supreme demonstration of God’s love. It was impossible that there should be any discord among the Persons of the Godhead in reference to the salvation of men. The will of the Godhead is, and necessarily must be, one. The Atonement was not the cause, but the effect, of God’s love:

“In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9, 10).

From what other source could have proceeded the giving of Christ to save men but from *LOVE* — pure sovereign benignity!

The Love of God! How blessed is this to the hearts of believers, for only believers can appreciate it, and they but very imperfectly. It is to be noted that here in John 3:16 there are seven things told us about God’s love;

**First**, the tense of His love — “God so loved.” It is not God loves, but He “loved.” That He loves us now that we are His children, we can, in measure, understand; but that He should have loved us before we became His children passes knowledge. But He did.

“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

And again:

“Yea, I have loved thee with *an everlasting love*: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3).

**Second**, the magnitude of His love — “God so loved.” None can define or measure that little word “so.” There are dimensions to the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of His wondrous love, that none can measure.

**Third**, the scope of God’s love — “God so loved the world.” It was not limited to the narrow bounds of Palestine, but it flowed out to sinners of the Gentiles, too.

**Fourth**, the nature of God’s love — “God so loved the world that he gave.” Love, real love, ever seeks the highest interest of others. Love is unselfish; it gives.

**Fifth**, the sacrificial character of God’s love — “he gave his only begotten Son.” God spared not His BEST. He freely delivered up Christ, even to the death of the Cross,

**Sixth**, the design of His love”. That whosoever believeth on him *should not perish*.” Many died in the wilderness from the bites of the serpents: and many of Adam’s race will suffer eternal death in the lake of fire. But God purposed to have a people who “should not perish.” Who this people are is made manifest by their “believing” on God’s Son.

**Seventh**, the *beneficence* of God’s love —

“But have *everlasting life*.” This is what God imparts to every one of His own. Ah, must we not exclaim with the

apostle, “Behold, *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us*”! (1 John 3:1).

O dear Christian reader, if ever you are tempted to doubt God’s love go back to the Cross, and see there how He gave up to that cruel death His “only begotten Son.”

“For 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 verse enlarges upon the beneficent nature and purpose of God’s love. Unselfish in its character — for *love* “seeketh not her own” — it ever desires the good of those unto whom it flows forth. When God sent His Son here it was not to “condemn the world,” as we might have expected. There was every reason why the world should have been condemned. The heathen were in an even worse condition than the Jews. Outside the little land of Palestine, the knowledge of the true and living God had well nigh completely vanished from the earth. And where God is not known and loved, there is no love among men for their neighbors. In every Gentile nation idolatry and immorality were rampant. One has only to read the second half of Romans 1 to be made to marvel that God did not then sweep the earth with the besom of destruction, But no; He had other designs, gracious designs. God sent His Son into the world that the world through Him “might be saved.” It is to be remarked that the word “might” here does not express any uncertainty. Instead it declares the purpose of God in the sending of His Son. In common speech the word “might” signifies a contingency. It is only another case of the vital importance of ignoring man’s dictionaries and the way he employs words, and turning to a concordance to see how the Holy Spirit uses each word in the Scriptures themselves. The word “might” — as a part of the verb — expresses design. When we are told that God sent His Son into the world that through Him “the world might be saved,” it signifies that “through him the world should be saved,” and this is how it is rendered in the R. V. For other instances we refer the reader to 1 Peter 3:18 — “might bring us to God” implies no uncertainty whatever, but tells of the object to be accomplished. For further examples see Galatians 4:5; Titus 2:14; 2 Peter 1:4, etc., etc.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

For the believer there is “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1), because Christ was condemned in his stead — the “chastisement of our peace” was upon Him. But the unbeliever is “condemned already.” By nature he is a “child of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3), not corruption merely. He enters this world with the curse of a sin-hating God upon him. If he hears the Gospel and receives not Christ he incurs a new and increased condemnation through his unbelief. How emphatically this proves that the sinner is *responsible* for his unbelief!

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Here is the *cause* of man’s unbelief: he loves the darkness, and therefore hates the light. What a proof of his depravity! It is not only that men are in the dark, but they *love* the darkness — they prefer ignorance, error, superstition, to the light of truth. And the reason why they love the darkness and hate the light is because their deeds are evil.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:20, 21).

Here is the final test. “*Every one that doeth (practices) evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light,*” and why? — “lest his deeds should be reprov'd.” That is why men refuse to read the Scriptures. God’s Word would condemn them. On the other hand, “he that doeth truth,” which describes what is characteristic of every believer, “cometh to the light” — note the perfect tense — he comes again and again to the light of God’s Word. And for what purpose? To learn God’s mind, that he may cease doing the things which are displeasing to Him, and be occupied with that which is acceptable in

His sight. Was not this the final word of Christ to Nicodemus, addressed to his conscience? This ruler of the Jews had come to Jesus “by night,” as though his deeds would not bear the light!

For the benefit of those who would prepare for the next lesson we submit the following questions:

1. What does the “much water” teach? verse 23.
2. What was the real purpose of the Jews in coming to John and saying what is recorded in verse 26?
3. What is the meaning of verse 27?
4. What vitally important lesson for the Christian is taught in verse 29?
5. What is the meaning of verse 33?
6. What is meant by the last half of verse 34?
7. How does verse 35 bring out the Deity of Christ?

# JOHN 3:22-36

## CHRIST MAGNIFIED BY HIS FORERUNNER

We give first a brief Analysis of the passage which is to occupy our attention. Here we see:

1. The Lord Jesus and His Disciples in Judea, verse 22.
2. John baptizing in Aenon, verses 23, 24.
3. The attempt to provoke John's jealousy, verses 25, 26.
4. The humility of John, verses 27, 28.
5. The joy of John, verse 29.
6. The preeminence of Christ, verses 30-35.
7. The inevitable alternative, verse 36.

Another typical picture is presented in the passage before us, though its lines are not so easily discernible as in some of the others which we have already looked at.

The spiritual state of Judaism as it existed at the time of our Lord's sojourn on earth is revealed in three pathetic statements; first, the Jews were occupied with the externals of religion (verse 25); second, they were envious of the results attending the ministry of Christ (verse 26); third, they rejected the testimony of the Savior (verse 32). How pointedly did these things expose the condition of Israel as a nation! With no heart for the Christ of God, and ignorant, too, of the position occupied by His forerunner (verse 28), they were concerned only with matters of ceremonialism. Religious they were, but for a Savior they felt no need. They preferred to wrangle over questions of "purification," rather than go to the Lord Jesus for the Water of life. But this was not all. They were jealous of the outward success that attended the ministry of the Lord Jesus in its early stages. How this revealed their hearts! Plainer still is what we read of them in verse 32 — the testimony of Christ they "received not."

The Savior was not only "despised" by them, He was "rejected," too. Once more, then, is the awful condition of Judaism made manifest before our eyes.

“After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized” (John 3:22).

This must be read in the light of John 4:2. By linking these two verses together an important principle is established: what is done by the servants of Christ *by His authority* is as though it had been done by Christ immediately. It is the same as what we read of in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

It is the same in prayer. When we really pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, it is as though Christ Himself were the suppliant.

“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” (John 3:23).

The meaning of the names of these places — like all others in Scriptures — are deeply significant. Aenon signifies “place of springs,” Salim means “peace.” What a blessed place for John to be in! These names point a striking contrast from “the wilderness of Judea” and “the region round about Jordan” (cf. Matthew 3:1, 5), which speak of drought and death. Surely there is a most important lesson taught us here, and a most precious one too. The place of drought and death was where God had called the forerunner of Christ to labor, and as he there bore faithful witness to the Lord Jesus it became to him a place of “springs” (refreshment) and “peace!” Such is ever the experience of the obedient servant of God.

“John also was baptizing.” There is a word of great practical importance here for many a servant of God. The Lord Jesus was there in Judea in person, and His disciples were with Him, baptizing. The crowds which at first attended the preaching of John had now deserted him, and were thronging to Christ (verse 26). What then does the Lord’s forerunner do? Does he decide that his work is now finished, and that God no longer has need of him? Does he become

discouraged because his congregations were so small? Does he quit his work and go on a long vacation? Far, far from it. He faithfully persevered: “John *also* was baptizing.” Has this no message for us? Perhaps these lines may be read by some who used to minister to big crowds. But these are no more. Another preacher has appeared, and the crowds flock after him. What then? Must you then conclude that God has set you aside? Are you suffering this experience to discourage you? Or, worse still, are you *envious* of the great success attending the labors of another! Ah, fellow-servants of Christ, take to heart this word — “John also was baptizing.” His season of popularity might be over: his light might be eclipsed by that of a greater: the crowds might have become thin; but, nevertheless, he plodded on and faithfully persevered in the work God had given him to do!

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not*” (Galatians 6:9).

John performed his duty and fulfilled his course.

“John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was *much water* there.” This is one of the many verses in the New Testament which plainly intimates the mode of baptism. If baptism were by sprinkling or by pouring, “much water” would not be required. The fact that John baptized in Aenon “because there was much water there” strongly implies that the scriptural form of baptism is immersion. But the one who desires to know and carry out God’s mind is not left to mere inferences, forceful though they may be. The very word “baptized” (both in the Greek and in English) signifies “to dip or immerse.” The Greek words for sprinkling and pouring” are entirely different from the one for baptize. Again; the example of our blessed Lord Himself ought to settle all controversy. No unprejudiced mind can read Matthew 3:16 without seeing that the Lord Jesus was immersed. Finally, the testimony of Romans 6 is unequivocal and conclusive. There we read, “We are buried with Him *by baptism* into death” (verse 3).

“Then there arose a question between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying” (John 3:25).

The “Jews” mentioned here are the same as those we read of in John 1:19, who sent a delegation unto the Baptist to inquire who he was. There is a slight difference between the ancient Greek MSS, and following a variation of reading the R.V. says, “There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John’s disciples with *a Jew* about purifying.” But we are thoroughly satisfied that here, as in the great majority of instances, the is preferable to the R.V. Clearly it is “the Jews” of John 1:19 who are before us again in John 3:25. This is seen from what we read in verse 28: “Ye yourselves bear me witness, *that I said*, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.” The Baptist reminds them of the testimony he bore before their representatives on the previous occasion, for John 3:28 corresponds exactly with John 1:20 and 23.

“And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him” (John 3:26).

What was the object of these Jews? Was not their motive a malicious one? Were they not seeking to make John envious? It would certainly appear so. Why tell him of the outward success of Christ’s ministry if it were not to provoke the jealousy of His harbinger? And cannot we detect the Enemy of souls behind this! This is ever a favorite device with him, to make one servant of the Lord envious at the greater success enjoyed by another. And alas! how frequently does he gain his wicked ends thus. It is only those who seek not honor of men, but desire only the glory of their Lord, that are proof against such attacks.

A striking example of the above principle is found in connection with Moses, who

“was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

In Numbers 11:26, 27 we read,

“But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were

written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.”

Now notice what follows — “And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.” Even Joshua was jealous for his master’s sake. But how blessedly did Moses rebuke him: “And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that *all* the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!”

The same unselfish spirit is seen in that one who referred to himself as “less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8). While the beloved apostle was a prisoner in Rome, many of the brethren waxed confident, and were bold to speak the word without fear. True, some preached Christ of envy and strife, and some also of good will. How then did the apostle feel? Did he think these others were seeking to take advantage of his absence? Was he jealous of their labors? Not so: he said:

“Notwithstanding... I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:14-18).

So, again, he learns of the ministry of Philemon in refreshing the saints, and to him he writes,

“we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Philemon 7).

May more of this spirit be found in us and in other of the Lord’s servants as we learn of how God is using them.

“John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (John 3:27).

It is beautiful to see how John conducted himself on this occasion. His reply was most becoming. First, he bows to God’s sovereign will (verse 27). Second, he reminds his tempters of his previous disclaimer of any other place being his save that of one “sent before” the Lord (John 1:28). Third, he declared that Israel belonged

to Christ, not to himself (verse 29). Fourth, he affirms that his own joy was fulfilled in seeing men turning to the Lord Jesus (verse 29). Finally, he insists that while Christ must “increase,” he must “decrease” (verse 30). Blessed self-abnegation was this.

“John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” John was not at all surprised at the lack of spiritual perception in these Jews. The things of God cannot be discerned by the natural man. Before a man can even “receive” spiritual things they must first be “given him from heaven.” And in the bestowment of His gifts God is sovereign. We are fully satisfied that the contents of this twenty-seventh verse contains the key to much that is puzzling. There are some brethren, beloved of the Lord, who do not see the truth of believer’s baptism; there are others who stumble over the subject of predestination. What may be as clear as sunlight to us, is dark to them. But let us not be puffed up by our superior knowledge. Let us remember the admonition of the apostle Paul,

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory (boast), as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

But on the other hand, there is no excuse for ignorance in the things of God. Far from it. God has plainly made known His mind. His blessed Word is here in our hands. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to guide us into all truth. And it is our responsibility to believe and understand all that is recorded for our learning:

“And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2).

Nevertheless, there is the Divine side, too; and this is what is before us here in John 3:27. What did the Lord Jesus say in response to the unbelief of the cities wherein His mightiest works were done?

“Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and *hast revealed* them unto babes. Even

so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25, 26).

What did He say to Peter, when that apostle bore such blessed testimony to His Messiahship and Deity?

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar- Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17).

And what is recorded of Lydia?

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened*, THAT (in order that) she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

And yet God is not capricious. If it is not “given” to us the fault is all our own. We “have not” because we “ask not” (James 4:2). Or, we “find” not, because we are too lazy to “search” diligently for the precious things of God. Here is His sure promise, provided we meet the conditions annexed to it:

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou *seekest* her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the *knowledge of God*” (Proverbs 2:1-5).

“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him” (John 3:28).

John now announces what he was not, and what he was. He was but the messenger before the face of Christ, His forerunner. A subordinate place, therefore, was his. How blessed was this. These Jews were seeking to stir up the pride of John. But the Lord’s servant takes his proper place before them. He reminds them that he was only one “sent before” Christ.

“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” (John 3:29).

The first thing which claims our attention here is the opening sentence of this verse. Who is meant by the “bride” which the Lord Jesus even then was said to “have?” In seeking the answer to this question, particular attention should be paid to the connection in which this statement is found, the *circumstances* under which it was made, and also to the person who uttered it. The *connection* in which this occurs is discovered by going back to John 3:22, 23. The disciples of Jesus, as well as John himself, were “baptizing.” This was not Christian baptism, for that was not instituted until after the death and resurrection of the Savior. This baptism, therefore, was *kingdom* baptism, and was one of the conditions of entrance into it (cf. Matthew 3). The *circumstances* under which this statement was made is seen in that John 3:29 formed part of the Baptist’s reply to those who were seeking to arouse his envy over the fact that the crowds were now flocking to Christ. The person who uttered it was not Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, but John the Baptist, whose ministry was *confined* to Israel, and who here styles himself “the friend of the Bridegroom.”

When the Baptist said “He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom,” he was not referring to the Church, the Body of Christ, for of that he knew nothing whatever, nor did any one else save the Triune God. At that time Christ was not forming a church, but as “the minister of the circumcision” He was presenting Himself to Israel. A repenting and believing few gathered around Him. That the twelve apostles are connected with Christ in an earthly relationship (though also, of course, members of the household of faith, and of the family of God) is clear from the words of the Savior:

“Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of *Israel*” (Matthew 19:28).

This is something which the apostle Paul — the apostle of the Gentiles, the one through whom God made known the truth of one Body — will never do.

“He that *hath* the bride” was the language of faith. The company who will form the “bride” was then far from being complete; only a nucleus was there, but faith viewed the purpose of God concerning Israel as *already accomplished*. But “he that hath the bride” rules out the one body, for that did not begin to be formed until several years later. If further proof of the correctness of what we have written be asked for, it is at once forthcoming in the very next sentence: “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.” Without a doubt this refers to John the Baptist himself. But in no possible sense was he associated with heralding the truth of the Church which is the Body of Christ. His own language, as recorded in John 1:31 is final:

“But that he should be made manifest to *Israel*, therefore, am I come baptizing with water.”

Let it be clearly understood that in this chapter we are neither denying nor affirming that the Body of Christ will be His heavenly bride. That does not fall within the compass of the present passage. What we have attempted to do is to give a faithful exposition of John 3:29, and the “bride” there plainly refers to a company of regenerated Israelites, a company not yet completed. The work of gathering out that company has been *interrupted* by the rejection of Christ by the Jewish nation as a whole, and this has been followed by the present *period*. But after the Body of Christ has come

“in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13)

God will *resume* His work with Israel and complete that company which is to be gathered out from them.

“But the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice” (verse 29).

This is very blessed. Notice first, how we have repeated here what we called attention to when considering John 1:35-37: the two disciples of John “stood” before they heard their master “speak” and say “Behold the lamb of God.” The order is the same in the verse now before us — “Which standeth and heareth him.” Standing signifies the cessation of activity: it denotes an act of concentrated attention. The principle illustrated is a deeply important one. It is one which needs to be pressed in this day of hustling and bustling about, which is only the product of the energy of the flesh. We must “stand” before we can “hear Him.”

“This my joy therefore is fulfilled” (verse 29). How precious is this! Joy of heart is the fruit of being “*occupied with Christ!*” It is standing and hearing *His voice* which delights the soul. But again we say that the all-important prerequisite for this is a cessation of the activities of the flesh. His voice cannot be heard if we are rushing hither and thither in fellowship with the fearful bedlam all around us. The “better part” is not to be like Martha — “cumbered about much serving” — but is to “sit” at the feet of the Lord Jesus like Mary did, hearing His word (see Luke 10:38-42). Notice, too, the tense of the verbs in John 3:29: “standeth and heareth.” The perfect tense expresses continuous action: again and again, daily, this must be done, if our joy is to be filled full. Is not our failure at this very point the explanation of our joyless lives?

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Blessed climax was this to the lovely modesty of John, and well calculated to crush all party feeling and nip in the bud any jealousy there might be in the hearts of his own disciples. In principle this is inseparably connected with what he had just said before in the previous verse. The more I “decrease” the more I delight in standing and hearing the voice of that blessed One who is Altogether Lovely. And so conversely. The more I stand and hear His voice, the more will He “increase” before me, and the more shall I “decrease.” I cannot be occupied with two objects at one and the same time. To “decrease” is, we take it, to be less and less occupied with ourselves. The more I am occupied with Christ, the less shall I be occupied with myself. Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a *by-product*. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was “meek

and lowly in heart,” if I am constantly beholding His glory in the mirror of God’s Word, then shall I be

“changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The passage now before us contains the final testimony of the Baptist to the Lord Jesus Christ. In it the Savior and His servant are sharply contrasted. In witnessing to the manifold glories of his Master, John the Baptist draws a seven-fold contrast. First, John was one who could receive nothing, except it were given him from heaven (verse 27); whereas Christ was the One to whom the Father “hath given all things” (verse 35). Second, Jesus was the Christ, whereas John was only one “sent before Him” (verse 28). Third, Christ was the “bridegroom,” whereas John was but the “friend” of the Bridegroom (verse 29). Fourth, Christ must “increase,” whereas John himself must “decrease” (verse 30). Fifth, John was “of the earth,” whereas the Lord Jesus had come “from above,” and “is above all” (verse 31). Sixth, John had only a measure of the Spirit, but of Christ it is witnessed, “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (verse 34). Seventh, John was but a servant, whereas the Savior was none less than the Son of the Father (verse 35). What a blessed and complete testimony was this to the immeasurable superiority of the Lord of Glory!

“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” (John 3:31).

John now witnesses to the person, the glory, and the testimony of Christ. It seems to us that John is here giving point to one of the seven contrasts contained in this testimony which he here drew between Christ and himself.

“Earth and earthly” must not be understood to signify “world and worldly.” John was of the earth, and spoke of things which pertain to the earth. But the Lord was from heaven, and is above all. All other messengers that God has sent had much earthiness about them, as those of us who are His servants now have much of it. We are limited by our finite grasp. The bodies of death in which we dwell are a severe handicap. Our vision is largely confined to the things of

earth. But there were no limitations to the Lord Jesus: He was the Son of God from heaven, pure, perfect, omniscient.

“And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth” (John 3:32).

The testimony which Christ bore was a perfect one. The prophets received their message from the Holy Spirit, and they spoke of things which they *had not* “seen” — see Matthew 13:17. There are things which the angels desire to look into, but they were too mysterious for them to fathom—see 1 Peter 1:12. But our Lord Jesus Christ knows “heavenly things” by His own perfect knowledge, for He hath ever dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He knew the mind of God for He is God.

“And no man receiveth his testimony” (John 3:32). How radically different was this word of John from that of the Jews who declared “all men come to him,” verse 26! One lesson we may draw from this is the unreliability of statistics which seek to tabulate spiritual results. Those Jews were looking at the outward appearance only, and from that point of view the cause of Christ seemed to be prospering in an extraordinary way. But the Lord’s forerunner looked beneath the surface, at the true spiritual results, and his verdict was “no man receiveth his testimony.” Beware then of statistics, they depend largely on the one who compiles them. Some who are sanguine, will say everything that is pleasing and encouraging; others, who are more serious and severe in their judgment, will say much that is depressing.

“No man receiveth his testimony.” This is not to be understood without qualification, for the very next words declare “he that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.” It is evident that what John meant was that comparatively none received the testimony of Christ. Compared with the crowds which came to Him, compared with the nation of Israel as a whole, those who “received” Christ’s testimony were so few, that they were as though none at all received it. And is it not the same today? In this favored land Christ is preached to multitudes, and many there are who hear about Him; but, alas! how few give evidence of having really received His testimony into their hearts!

And *why* is it that men receive not the testimony of this One who “cometh from heaven” (verse 31), who testifies of what He has seen and heard (verse 32), and who has the Spirit without measure (verse 34), yea, who is none other than the — Son beloved of the Father (verse 35)? It is because they are earthly. The message is too heavenly for them. They have no relish for it. They have hearts only for things below. Others are too learned to believe anything so simple: it is still to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness. They will not believe God; and how can they while “they receive honor from men!” With others it is wide that hinders. They think themselves good enough already. They are pharisaical. They are too high-born to see their need of being born again. They are too haughty to take the place of empty-handed beggars and receive God’s *gift*. But the root reason for rejecting the testimony of Christ is that,

“men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Men are so depraved their hearts are hardened and their understandings are darkened, and therefore, do they prefer the darkness to the light.

“He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33).

To “set to his seal” means to certify and ratify. By faith in the Lord Jesus the believer has come to know God as a reality. Hitherto he heard of and talked about an unknown God, but now he knows God for himself, and declares his faith in His fidelity. God says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,” and the believer finds that God is true, for he lives now in newness of life. The Lord says, “He that believeth on him is not condemned,” and the believer knows it is so, for the burden of guilt is gone from his conscience. Those who receive Christ’s testimony as true, take it unto themselves. They rest their souls upon it. They make it their own. They allow nothing to make them doubt what He has said. No matter whether they can thoroughly understand it or no; no matter whether it seems reasonable or unreasonable, they implicitly believe it. Whether their feelings respond or not, makes no difference — the Son of God has spoken, and that is enough.

“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:34).

The Lord Jesus Christ was sent here by God, and He spoke only the words of God. Testimony to this fact was borne to Him by the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration:

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased: hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5).

And Christ differed from every other messenger sent from God — in all things He has “the pre-eminence.” Others had the Spirit “by measure.” They knew but fragments of the truth of God. To them the Spirit came and then went again. Moreover, their gifts varied: one had a certain gift from the Spirit, another an entirely different gift. But God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Christ. The Lord Jesus knew the full truth of God, for He Himself is the Truth. On Him the Spirit did not come and go; instead, we read, He “abode upon him” (John 1:32). And further: Christ was endowed with every Divine gift. In contrast from the fragmentary communications of God through the prophets (see Hebrews 1:1), Christ fully and finally received the mind of God. We believe that the full meaning of these words that Christ had the Spirit “without measure” is a statement that is strictly parallel with what we read in Colossians 2:9,

“For in Him dwelleth *all the fulness* of the Godhead bodily.”

“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his band” (John 3:35).

What a glorious testimony was this! Christ was more than a messenger or witness for God, He was the “Son” beloved of the Father. Not only so, He was the One into whose hand the Father had “given all things.” How this brings out, again, the absolute Deity of Christ! To none but to One absolutely equal with Himself could the Father give “all things.”

“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 3:36).

Here is the inevitable alternative. Salvation comes through believing, believing on the Son. How Divinely simple! Those who believe on the Son have “everlasting life” as a present possession, though the full enjoyment as well as the full manifestation of it are yet future. But those who believe not the Son “shall not see life,” neither enter into it nor enjoy it; instead, the wrath of a sin-hating God “abideth” on them. It is upon them even now, and if they believe not, it shall abide on them for ever and ever. How unspeakably solemn! How it behooves every reader to seriously and honestly face the question — To which class do I belong? — to those who believe on the Son, or to those who believe not on the Son?

The following questions concern the next lesson:

1. What are we to learn from the statement that “Jesus himself baptized not”? John 4:2.
2. Why did the Lord “leave Judea” when He knew the Pharisees were jealous? John 4:3.
3. What prophetic foreshadowing do we have in John 4:3, 4?
4. Why was it that Christ “must needs” go through Samaria? John 4:4.
5. What are we to learn from the fact that the meeting between Christ and the Samaritan woman occurred at a “well”? John 4:6.
6. Why are we told that it was “Jacob’s well”? John 4:6.
7. What is suggested by the “sixth hour”? John 4:6.

# JOHN 4:1-6

## CHRIST AT SYCHAR'S WELL

We begin with the usual Analysis of the passage that is to be before us. In it we see: —

1. The Lord's knowledge of the Pharisees' jealousy, verse 1.
2. The disciples of the Lord baptizing, verse 2.
3. The Lord leaving Judea and departing into Galilee, verse 3.
4. The constraint of Divine grace, verse 4.
5. The Journey to Sychar, verse 5.
6. The Savior's weariness, verse 6.
7. The Savior resting, verse 6.

Like the first three chapters of John, this fourth also furnishes us with another aspect of the deplorable spiritual grate that Israel was in at the time the Lord was here upon earth. It is remarkable how complete is the picture supplied us. Each separate scene gives some distinctive feature. Thus far we have seen,

**First**, a blinded Priesthood (John 1:19, 26); **Second**, a joyless Nation (John 2:3); **Third**, a desecrated Temple (John 2:14); **Fourth**, a spiritually-dead Sanhedrin (John 3:7);

**Fifth**, the person of Christ despised (John 3:26) and His testimony rejected (John 3:32). Now we are shown the heartless indifference of Israel toward their semi-heathen neighbors.

Israel had been highly privileged of God, and not the least of their blessings was a written revelation from Him. But though favored with much light themselves, they were selfishly indifferent toward those who were in darkness. Right within the bounds of their own land (for Samaria was a part of it), dwelt those who were semi-heathen, yet had the Jews no love for their souls and no concern for their spiritual welfare. Listen to the tragic plaint of one of their number: "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). The heartless indifference of the favored people of God toward the Samaritans is intimated further in the surprise shown by the disciples when they returned and found the Savior talking with this

Samaritan woman (Luke 4:27). It was, no doubt, in order to rebuke them that the Savior said,

“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” (John 4:35).

Thus, this heartless neglect of the Samaritans gives us another glimpse of Israel’s state at that time.

But not only does John 4 give us another picture of the miserable condition the Jews were in, but, once more, it contains a prophetic foreshadowing of the future. In the closing verses of the previous chapter we are shown the person of Christ despised (John 3:26) and His testimony rejected (John 3:32). This but anticipated the final rejection of Christ by the Nation as a whole. Now in marvelous consonance with this, the very next thing we see is Christ turning to the Gentiles! The order here, as everywhere, is perfect. As we all know, this is exactly what happened in God’s dispensational dealings with the earth. No sooner did the old dispensation end, end with Israel’s rejection of Christ, than God in mercy turned to the Gentiles (Romans 11, etc.). This is intimated in our lesson, first, by the statement made in verse 3: the Lord Jesus “*left Judea*, and departed again into *Galilee*” — cf. Matthew 4:15 — “Galilee of the *Gentiles!*” Second, in the fact that here the Lord Jesus is seen occupied not with the Jews but with the Samaritans. And third, by what we read of in verse 40 — “and He abode *there two days.*” How exceedingly striking is this! “He abode *there two days.*” Remember that word in 2 Peter 3:8, which declares “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Two “days,” then or 2,000 years is the length of time that Christ was to be away from the Jews in Judea. How perfect and accurate is this picture!

At the close of the seventh chapter we called attention to the importance of noticing the relation of one passage to another. This is a principle which has been sadly neglected by Bible students. Not only should we be diligent to examine each verse in the light of its context, but also each passage as a whole should be studied *in its relation* to the complete passage which precedes and follows it. By attending to this it will often be found that the Holy Spirit has placed

in juxtaposition two incidents — miracles, parables, conversations, as the case may be — in order to point a contrast, or series of contrasts between them. Such we saw was plainly the case with what we have in the first and second halves of John 2, where a sevenfold contrast is to be noted. Another striking example is before us here. There is a manifest antithesis between what we have in the first half of John 3 and the first half of John 4.

As we study John 3 and 4 together, we discover a series of striking contrasts. Let us look at them.

**First**, in John 3 we have “a man of the Pharisees *named* Nicodemus:” in John 4 it is an unnamed woman that is before us.

**Second**, the former was a man of rank, a “Master of Israel:” the latter was a woman of the lower ranks, for she came “to draw water.”

**Third**, the one was a favored Jew: the other was a despised Samaritan.

**Fourth**, Nicodemus was a man of high reputation, a member of the Sanhedrin: the one with whom Christ dealt in John 4 was a woman of dissolute habits.

**Fifth**, Nicodemus sought out Christ: here Christ seeks out the woman.

**Sixth**, Nicodemus came to Christ “by night:” Christ speaks to the woman at mid-day.

**Seventh**, to the self-righteous Pharisee Christ said, “Ye must be born again:” to this sinner of the Gentiles He tells of “the gift of God.” How much we miss by failing to compare and contrast what the Holy Spirit has placed side by side in this wondrous revelation from God! May the Lord stir up all of us to more diligent *study* of His Word.

“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” (John 4:1-3).

Even at that early date in Christ's public ministry the Pharisees had begun to manifest their opposition against Him. But this is not difficult to understand, for the teaching of the Lord Jesus openly condemned their hypocritical practices. Moreover, their jealousy was aroused at this new movement, of which He was regarded as the head. The Baptist was the son of a priest that ministered in the Temple, and this would entitle him to some consideration. But here was a man that was regarded as being no more than the son of a carpenter, and who was He to form a following! And, too, He was of Nazareth, now working in Judea! And "out of Nazareth," they taught, "could arise no prophet" (John 7:52). A spirit of rivalry was at work, and the report was being circulated that "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John." Every one knew what crowds had flocked to the preaching and baptizing of that Elijah-like prophet, crying in the wilderness. Was it to be suffered then, that this One of poor parentage should eclipse the Baptist in fame? Surely not: that could not be allowed at any cost.

"When therefore the Lord knew... he left Judea." What a word is this! There is no hint of any one having informed Him. That was not necessary. The One who had humbled Himself to the infinite stoop of taking upon Him the form of a servant, was none other than "the *Lord*." This One whom the Pharisees contemptuously regarded as the Nazarene-carpenter, was none other than the Christ of God, in whom "dwelt all the fulness of the God-head bodily." "The Lord knew," at once displays His omniscience. Nothing could be, and nothing can be, hidden from Him.

["The Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John" \(John 1:1\).](#)

It is important to observe the order of the two verbs here for they tell us who, alone, are eligible for baptism. When two verbs are linked together thus, the first denotes the action, and the second *how* the action was performed. For example; suppose I said, "He poured oil on him and anointed him." You could not say, "He anointed him and poured oil on him," unless the anointing and the pouring were two different acts. Therefore, the fact that "baptizing" here comes after, and not before, the verb "made," proves that they were disciples

first, and were “baptized” subsequently. It is one of many passages in the New Testament which, uniformly, teaches that only one who is already a believer in Christ is qualified for baptism.

“Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples” (John 1:2).

This is but a parenthetical statement, nevertheless, it is of considerable importance. It has been well said by the late Bishop Ryle, “This verse intimates that baptism is neither the first nor the chief thing about Christianity. We frequently read of Christ preaching and praying, once of His administering the Lord’s Supper, but ‘baptize’ He did not — as though to show us that baptism has nothing to do with salvation.”

“He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee” (John 1:3).

This is exceedingly solemn. To cherish the spirit of jealousy and rivalry is to drive away the Lord. When the Savior sent forth the twelve on their mission to the cities of Israel, He bade them

“And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them” (Luke 9:5).

And again, when sending forth the seventy, He said to them,

“But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you” (Luke 10:10, 11)

But before He did this, He first set them an example. If “no man” would receive His testimony in Judea (John 3:3), then He would leave for other parts. He would not stay to cast pearls before swine.

No doubt the preaching of the Lord Jesus in Judea, and especially the circumstance of baptizing many of the people (through the instrumentality of His disciples) had greatly angered the Jewish rulers, and probably they had already taken steps to prevent the progress of this One whose teaching so evidently conflicted with theirs, and whose growing influence over the minds of the people

threatened to weaken their authority. Our Lord knew this, and because His hour was not yet come, and much was to be done by Him before He finished the work the Father had given Him to do, instead of waiting until He should be driven out of Judea, He left that district of His own accord, and retired into Galilee, which, being remote from Jerusalem, and under the governorship of Herod, was more or less outside of their jurisdiction and less subject to the power of the Sanhedrin.

“In going from Judea into Galilee, our Lord’s most direct route lay through Samaria, which was a district of Palestine, bounded on the south by Judea, and on the north by Galilee, on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, and on the east by the river Jordan. It was possible to go from Judea into Galilee by crossing the Jordan, and passing through Perea; but this was a very circuitous route, though some of the stricter Jews seemed to have been in the habit of taking it, to avoid intercourse with the Samaritans. The direct route lay through Samaria” (Dr. J. Brown).

Samaria was a province allotted to Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh in the days of Joshua (see Joshua 16 and 17, and particularly Joshua 17:7). After the revolt of the ten tribes, the inhabitants of this district had generally ceased to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and following first the wicked idolatry introduced by Jeroboam the son of Nebat (see 1 Kings 12:25-33, and note “Shechem” in verse 25), they fell an easy prey to the Gentile corruptions introduced by his successors. After the great body of the ten tribes had been carried away captives, and their district left almost without inhabitant, the king of Assyria planted in their province a colony of various nations (2 Kings 17:24) who, mingling with the few original inhabitants of the land, formed unto themselves a strange medley of a religion, by combining the principles and rights of Judaism with those of oriental idolaters. As the inspired historian tells us, they

“feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations who carried them away from thence... So these nations feared the

Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day" (2 Kings 17:32, 33, 41).

Thus, the original dwellers in Samaria were, to a great extent, heathenized. At the time of the return of the remnant of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans offered to enter into an alliance with the Jews (Ezra 4:1, 2), and on being refused (Ezra 4:3) they became the bitter enemies of the Jews and their most active opposers in the rebuilding of their Temple and capital (see Nehemiah 4 and 6). According to Josephus (see his "Antiquities" XI:7, 2; XIII:9), at a later date Manasseh, the son of Jaddua the high priest, contrary to the law, married the daughter of Sanballat, the chief of the Samaritans, and when the Jews insisted that he should either repudiate his wife, or renounce his sacred office, he fled to his father-in-law, who gave him an honorable reception, and by the permission of Alexander the Great built a temple to Jehovah on Mount Gerizim, in which Manasseh and his posterity officiated as high priests, in rivalry to the Divinely instituted ritual at Jerusalem — see also 1 Maccabees 3:10.

The Samaritans received as Divine the five books of Moses, and probably, also, some at least of the prophetic oracles; but they did not acknowledge the authenticity of the historical books written by the Jews, who they regarded as their worst enemies. The natural consequence of all these circumstances was, that the Jews and Samaritans regarded each other with much more rancorous dislike than either of them did the idolatrous nations by which they were surrounded. Hence when his enemies said unto Christ, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan?" (John 8:48), we can understand better the venom behind the insult. Hence, too, it makes us bow our hearts in wonderment to find the Lord Jesus representing Himself as "a certain Samaritan" (Luke 10:33) as we learn of the depths of ignominy into which He had descended and how He became the despised and hated One in order to secure our salvation.

"And he must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4).

The needs-be was a moral and not a geographical one. There were two routes from Judea to Galilee. The more direct was through Samaria. The other, though more circuitous, led through Perea and

Decapolis to the southern shores of Gennesaret. The former was the regular route. But the reason why the Lord “must” go through Samaria, was because of a Divine *needs-be*. From all eternity it had been ordained that *He should* go through Samaria. Some of God’s elect were there, and these must be sought and found — cf. the Lord’s own words in John 10:16, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring.” We shall never appreciate the Gospel until we go back to the basic truth of *predestination*, which puts God first, which makes the choice His before it is ours, and which, in due time, brings His grace to bear upon us with invincible power.

Election is of persons — predestination is of *things*. All the great movements of the universe are regulated by God’s will, — But if the great movements, then the small movements for the great depend upon the small. It was predestinated that our Savior should go through Samaria, because there *was* a chosen sinner there. And she was a chosen sinner, for if not she never would have chosen God, or known Jesus Christ. The whole machinery of grace was therefore set in motion in the direction of one poor lost sinner, that she might be restored to her Savior and to her God. That is what we wish to see in our own experience — to look back of ante- mundane ages, and date our eternal life from the covenant. To say:

*Father ‘twas Thy love that knew us  
Earth’s foundation long before  
That same love to Jesus drew us  
By its sweet constraining power,  
And will keep us  
Safely now and ever more  
(Dr. G. S. Bishop).*

It is not difficult to understand *why* the Lord must needs go through Samaria. There were those in Samaria whom the Father had given Him from all eternity, and these He “must” save. And, dear reader, if you are one of God’s elect there is a *needs be* put on the Lord Jesus Christ to save *you*. If you are yet in your sins, you will not always be. For years you may have been fleeing from Christ; but when His time comes He will overtake you. However you may kick against the pricks and contend against Him; however deeply you may sin, as

the woman in our passage, He will most surely overtake and conquer you. Yea, even now He is on the way!

“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” (John 4:5, 6).

How truly human was the Lord Jesus! He would in all points be like unto His brethren, so He did not exempt Himself from fatigue. How fully then can He sympathize with the laborer today who is worn out with toil! To the Savior, a long walk brought weariness, and weariness needed rest, and to rest He “sat thus” on the well. He was, apparently, more worn than the disciples, for they continued on into the village to buy food. But He was under a greater mental strain than they. He had a weariness they knew nothing about.

“Of the Son of man being in heaven, whilst upon earth, we have learnt in the previous chapter (John 3:13). Now, though Divine, and therefore in heaven, He was truly a man upon earth. This mystery of His person none of us can fathom (Matthew 11:27). Nor are we asked to. We have to believe it. ‘Perfect God, and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting’ — such has been the language of confession of the western part of Christendom for many an age. Now there are some conditions incident to humanity. There are others, in addition, connected with fallen humanity, such as liability to sickness, to disease, and even to death. To these last, of course, the holy Son of God was not, though a man, subject; yet, as being a man He was able to die, and willingly gave up His life for His people. But to sickness and bodily decay, as the Holy One, in whom was no sin, He was not, and *could not have been, subject*. On the other hand, from conditions incident to humanity, as hunger, thirst and weariness, He was not exempt. In the wilderness He was hungry. On the Cross He was thirsty. Here at the well He was weary. Into what circumstances, then, did He voluntarily come, and that in obedience and love to His Father, and in love to His own sheep! He, by whom the worlds were made, was sitting a weary man by Jacob’s well, and there at first alone. One word from the throne, and the whole angelic host would have flown to minister to Him. But that

word was not spoken. For God’s purpose of grace to souls in Samaria was to be worked out at Sychar” (C. E. Stuart).

“Jesus therefore being *wearied*.” This brings out the reality of Christ’s humanity. He was just as really and truly Man as He was God. In stressing His absolute Deity, we are in danger of overlooking the reality of His humanity. The Lord Jesus was perfect Man: He ate and drank, labored and slept, prayed and wept. And what a precious thought is there here for Christian workers: the Savior knew what it was to be “weary” — not weary of well doing, but weary in well doing. But it is blessed to see how the Holy Spirit has guarded the glory of Christ’s person here. Side by side with this word upon His humanity, we are shown His Divine omniscience revealed in His perfect knowledge of the history of the woman with whom He dealt at the well. This principle meets us at every turn in the Gospels. At His birth we behold His humiliation — lying in a manger — but we discover His Divine glory, too, for the angels were sent to announce the One born as “Christ the Lord.” See Him asleep in the boat, exhausted from the toil of a heavy day’s work: but mark the sequel, as He rises and stills the storm. Behold Him by the grave of Lazarus, groaning in spirit and weeping: and then bow before Him in worship as He, by a word from His mouth, brings the dead to life. So it is here: “wearied with his journey,” and yet displaying His Deity by reading the secrets of this woman’s heart.

“Jesus therefore being wearied with his journey, sat thus *on the well*” (John 4:6).

This illustrates another important principle, the application of which is often a great aid to the understanding of a passage, namely, noticing the place where a particular incident occurred. There is a profound significance to everything in Scripture, even the seemingly unimportant details. The character of the place frequently supplies the key to the meaning of what is recorded as occurring there. For instance: the children of Israel were *in Egypt* when the Lord delivered them. Egypt, then, symbolizes the place where we were when God apprehended us, namely, *the world* in which we groaned under the merciless taskmasters that dominated us. John the Baptist preached *in the wilderness*, for it symbolized the spiritual barrenness and desolation of Israel at that time. When the Lord Jesus enunciated

the laws of His kingdom, He went up into a mountain — a place of elevation, symbolic of His throne of authority from which He delivered His manifesto. When He gave the parables He “sat by the *sea side*” (cf. Isaiah 17:12, 13; Ezekiel 26:3; Daniel 7:2; Revelation 17:5, for the “sea” in its symbolic significance). The first four parables of Matthew 13 pertain to the public profession of Christianity, hence these were given in the hearing of the “great multitudes;” but the next two concerned only the Lord’s own people, so we read

“Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the *house*: and his disciples came unto him” (Matthew 13:36).

When the Lord portrayed the poor sinner as the one to whom He came to minister (under the figure of the good “Samaritan”) He represented him as a certain man who “went down from Jerusalem [foundation of peace] to Jericho [the city of the curse].” So, again, in Luke 15 the prodigal son is seen in “the *far country*” (away from the father), and there feeding on the husks which the swine did eat — another picture giving us the place where the sinner is morally.

The above examples, selected almost at random, illustrate the importance of observing the *place* where each event happened, and the position occupied by the chief actors. This same principle receives striking exemplification in the passage before us. The meeting between the Savior and this Samaritan adulteress occurred at Sychar which means “purchased”

so was the “gift of God” that He proffered to her. And, as He revealed to her her soul’s deep need He sat “on the well.” The “well” was a *figure of Himself*, and its water was the emblem of the salvation that is to be found in Him. One authority for these statements is Isaiah 12:3, “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells (Hebrews ‘the well’) of *salvation*.” What a remarkable statement is this! It is the key to the typical significance of many an Old Testament passage. The “well” of the Old Testament Scriptures foreshadowed Christ and what is to be found in Him. We shall now turn to some of the Old Testament passages where the “well” is mentioned, and discover how remarkably and blessedly they foreshadowed this One who gave the water of life to the woman of Samaria.

1. The first time the “well” is mentioned in Scripture, is in Genesis 16:6, 7, 13, 14.

“But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face. And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness... And she called the name of the Lord which spake unto her, Thou God seest me... for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me? Wherefore the well was called, The well of him that liveth and seeth me.”

Note the following points:

**First**, the “well” (the “fountain of water” of verse 7 is termed the “well” in verse 14) was the place where the angel of the Lord found this poor outcast. So Christ is where God meets the sinner, for “no man cometh unto the Father” but by Him.

**Second**, this well was located in the wilderness — fit symbol of *this world*. The “wilderness” well depicts the state of heart we were in when we first met Christ!

**Third**, the “well” was the place where *God was revealed*. Hagar, therefore, termed it, “the well of him that liveth and seeth me.” So, again, Christ is *the Revealer* of God — “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.”

2. In Genesis 21:14-19 we read,

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear

not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is... and God opened her eyes, and she saw *a well of water*.”

How inexpressibly blessed is this in its typical suggestiveness! Notice the following points:

**First**, we have before us again an outcast, and one whose water was spent, for she had but “a bottle:” like the prodigal son, she “began to be in want.”

**Second**, she had cast away her child to die, and there she sat weeping. What a picture of the poor, desolate, despairing sinner!

**Third**, God “opened her eyes,” and what for? In order that she might see the “well” that had been there all the time! Ah, was it not so with thee, dear Christian reader? It was not thine own mental acumen which discovered that One of whom the “well” here speaks.

It was God who opened thine eyes to see Him as the One who alone could meet thy desperate and deep need. What do we read in Proverbs 20:12 “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.” And again in John 5:20 we are told,

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us *an understanding*, that (in order that) we may know Him that is true.”

3. In this same chapter the “well” is mentioned again in another connection:

“And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place *the well of the oath*; because there they swore both of them” (Genesis 21:27- 31).

Here we find the “well” was the place of the “covenant” (verse 27), which was ratified by an “oath” (verse 31). And what do we read in

Hebrews 7:20-22? — “And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament [*covenant*].”

4. In Genesis 24:10-12 we read,

“And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day.”

Not only is each typical picture perfect, but the order in which they are found evidences Divine design. In the first scriptures we have glanced at, that which is connected with the “well” suggested the meeting between the Savior and the *sinner*. And in the last passage, the covenant and the oath speak of that which tells of the sure ground upon which our eternal preservation rests. And from that point, every reference to the “well” has that connected with it which is appropriate of *believers* only. In the last quoted passage, the “well” is the place of *prayer*: so, the believer asks the Father in the name of Christ, of whom the “well” speaks.

5. In Genesis 29:1-3 we read,

“Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. And he looked, and beheld a *well* in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks.”

This is very beautiful. How striking is the contrast between this typical scene and the first that we looked at in Genesis 16. There, where it is a sinner and Christ which is in view, the “well” is located in the *wilderness* figure of the barrenness and desolation of the sinner. But here, where the sheep are in view, the “well” is found in the *field* — suggesting the “green pastures” into which the good

Shepherd leads His own. Notice there were “three flocks of sheep that were lying by this “well,” their position denoting rest, that rest which Christ gives His own. Here in the field were the three flocks lying “by it” — the well. It is only in *Christ* that we find rest.

6. In Exodus 2:15-17 we are told,

“Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.”

How marvelous is this type. First, Pharaoh the king of Egypt prefigures Satan as the god of this world, attacking and seeking to destroy the believer. From him Moses “fled.” How often the great Enemy frightens us and gets us on the run. But how blessed to note the next statement here: fleeing from Pharaoh to Midian, where he now dwells, the first thing that we read of Moses is, “he sat down by a well.” Thank God there is One to whom we can flee for refuge — the Lord Jesus Christ to whom the “well” pointed. To this well the daughters of Jethro also came, for water. But the shepherds came and drove them away. How many of the “under-shepherds” today are, by their infidelistic teaching, driving many away from Christ. Nevertheless, God still has a Moses here and there, who will “*stand up and help*” those who really desire the Water of Life. But be it noted, before we can “help” others we must first be resting on the well for ourselves, as Moses was.

7. “And from thence they went to Beer: that is the *well* whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it” (Numbers 21:16, 17). What a word is this! The well is personified. It is made the object of song. It evokes praise. No interpreter is needed here. Beloved reader, are you “singing” unto the “Well?”

8. “Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them;

and they went and told king David. Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court: *whither they went down*. And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the *thing was not known*" (2 Samuel 17:17- 19). Here we find the "well" providing shelter and protection for God's people. Notice there was a "covering" over its mouth, so that Jonathan and Ahimaaz were hidden in the well. So it is with the believer — "your life is *hid with Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:3). how striking is the last sentence quoted above, "And the thing was not known!" The world is in complete ignorance of the believer's place and portion in Christ!

9. "And David longed, and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" (2 Samuel 23:15). Nothing but water from the well of Bethlehem would satisfy David.

10. "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well" (Proverbs 5:15). What a blessed climax is this. The "well" is our own, and from its "running waters" we are invited to "drink."

We sincerely pity any who may regard all of this as fanciful. Surely such need to betake themselves to Christ for "eyesalve," that their eyes may be enabled to behold "wondrous things" out of God's Law. To us this study has been unspeakably blessed. And what meaning it all gives to John 4:6 — "Jesus, therefore, being wearied with His journey sat thus on *the well*."

But there is one other word here that we must not overlook, a word that gives added force to the typical character of the picture before us, for it speaks of the *character* of that Salvation which is found *in* Christ. "Now *Jacob's well* was there" (John 4:6). There are three things in connection with this particular "well" that we need to consider.

**First**, this well was purchased by Jacob, or more accurately speaking, the "field" in which the well was located was purchased by him.

“And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-Aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he *bought* a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for an hundred pieces of money” (Genesis 33:18, 19).

The word “Sychar” in John 4:6 signifies *purchased*. What a well-chosen and suited place for Christ to speak to that woman of the “gift of God!” But let it never be forgotten that this “gift” costs us nothing, because it cost Him everything.

**Second**, the “parcel of ground” in which was this well, was afterwards taken by Joseph with

“*sword* and bow;.... And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with *my sword* and with my bow” (Genesis 48:21, 22)

that this is the *same* “parcel of ground” referred to in Genesis 33 is clear from John 4:5. The reference in Genesis 48 must be to a later date than what is in view in Genesis 33. The Amorites were seeking to rob Jacob of his well, and therefore an appeal to arms was necessary. This, we believe, fore shadowed the present interval, during which the Holy Spirit (while Satan is yet the “Prince of this world” and ever seeks to oppose and keep God’s Jacobs away from the “well”) is bringing salvation to souls by means of the “sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

**Third**, this portion purchased by Jacob, and later secured by means of the “sword and bow,” was *given to Joseph* (see Genesis 48:21, 22). This became a part of Joseph’s “birthright,” for said Jacob “I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren.” This ought to have been given to Reuben, Jacob’s “firstborn,” but through his fall into grievous sin it was transferred to Joseph (see 1 Chronicles 5:1). How marvelously accurate the type! Christ the second Man takes the inheritance which the first man forfeited and lost through sin!

Putting these three together, we have: the “well” purchased, the “well” possessed, the “well” enjoyed.

And here we must stop. In the next chapter we shall, D.V., consider carefully each sentence in verses 7-11. Let the student ponder prayerfully:—

What are we to learn from the fact that the Savior was the first to speak? verse 7.

Why did He begin by asking her for a drink? verse 7.

Was it merely a drink of water He had in mind! If not, what was it?

What is the force and significance of the parenthetical statement of verse 8?

What does the woman’s answer (verse 9) go to prove?

What is the “gift of God?” verse 10

Why does Christ liken salvation to “living water?” Enumerate the different thoughts suggested by this figure.

# JOHN 4:7-10

## CHRIST AT SYCHAR'S WELL (CONTINUED)

First, a brief Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The Woman of Samaria, verse 7.
2. The Savior's request, verse 7.
3. The Savior's solitariness, verse 8.
4. The Woman's surprise, verse 9.
5. The Woman's prejudice, verse 9.
6. The Savior's rebuke, verse 10.
7. The Savior's appeal, verse 10.

In the last chapter we pointed out the deep significance underlying the words of John 4:4 — “He *must needs* go through Samaria.” It was the constraint of sovereign grace. From all eternity it had been foreordained that the Savior should go through Samaria. The performing of God's eternal decree required it. The Son, incarnate, had come there to do the Father's will” — Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” And God's will was that these hated Samaritans should hear the Gospel of His grace from the lips of His own dear Son. Hence, “He *must needs* go through Samaria.” There were elect souls there, which had been given to Him by the Father, and these also He “*must bring*” (see John 10:16).

“Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well” (John 4:6).

Observe, particularly, that the Lord Jesus was beforehand with this woman. He was at the well first! “I am found of them that sought me not” (Isaiah 65:1) is the language of the Messiah in the prophetic word centuries before He made His appearance among men, and this oracle has been frequently verified. His salvation is not only altogether *unmerited* by those to whom it comes, but at first, it is always *unsought* (see Romans 3:11), and of every one who is numbered among His peculiar people it may be as truly said, as of the apostles, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). When we were pursuing our mad course of sin, when we

were utterly indifferent to the claims and superlative excellency of the Savior, when we had no serious thought at all about our souls, He — to use the apostle’s peculiarly appropriate word — “apprehended” us (Philippians 3:12). He “laid hold of” us, aroused our attention, illumined our darkened understanding, that we might receive the truth and be saved by it. A beautiful illustration of this is before us here in John 4.

Yes, the Lord was beforehand with this woman. He was found of one who sought Him not. It was so with the idolatrous Abraham (Joshua 24) in the land of Chaldea: the Lord of glory appeared to him while he was yet in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2). It was so with the worm Jacob, as he fled to escape from his brother’s anger (Genesis 28:10, 13). It was so with Moses, as he went about his shepherd duties (Exodus 3:1, 2). In each instance the Lord was found by those who sought Him not. It was so with Zacchaeus, hidden away amid the boughs of the trees”Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down,” was the peremptory command, for, saith the Lord, “to day, I must abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5). It was so with Saul of Tarsus, as he went on his way to persecute the followers of the Lamb. It was so with Lydia,

*“whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).*

And, let us add, to the praise of the glory of God’s grace, but to our own unutterable shame, it was so with the writer, when Christ “apprehended” him; apprehended him when he was altogether unconscious of his deep need, and had no desire whatever for a Savior. Ah, blessed be His name, “We love him, because he first loved us!”

But let not the false conclusion be drawn that the sinner is, therefore, irresponsible. Not so. God has placed within man a moral faculty, which discerns between right and wrong. Men know that they are sinners, and if so they need a Savior. God now commands all men everywhere to “repent,” and woe be to the one who disobeys. And again we read,

*“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23),*

and if men refuse to “believe” their blood is on their own heads. Christ receives all who come to Him. The Gospel announces eternal life to “whosoever believeth.” The door of mercy stands wide open. But, notwithstanding, it remains that men love darkness rather than light, and so strong is their love for the darkness and so deep-rooted is their antipathy against the light, that, as the Lord declared,

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44).

Here, again, is the Divine side, and it is this we are now pressing.

“And it was about the *sixth* hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water” (John 4:6, 7).

This means it was the sixth hour after sunrise, and would be, therefore, midday. It was at the time the sun was at its greatest height and heat. Under the glare of the oriental sun, at the time when those exposed to its strong rays were most weary and thirsty, came this woman to draw water. The hour corresponded with her spiritual condition — weary and parched in her soul. “The *sixth* hour.” What a significant line is this in the picture! Six invariably speaks of man in the flesh.

“*There cometh* a woman of Samaria to draw water” (verse 7). This was no accident. She chose this hour because she expected the well would be deserted. But, in fact, she went to the well that day, at that time, because God’s hour had struck when she was to meet the Savior. Ah, our least movements are directed and over-ruled by Divine providence. It was no accident that the Midianites were passing by when Joseph’s brethren had made up their minds to slay him (Genesis 37:28), nor was it merely a coincidence that these Midianites were journeying to Egypt. It was no accident that Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the river to bathe, nor that she “saw” the ark, which contained the infant Moses, “among the flags” (Exodus 2:5). It was no accident that at the very time Mordecai and the Jews were in imminent danger of being killed, that Ahasuerus could not sleep, and that he occupied himself with reading the court records, which told of how, aforetime, Mordecai had befriended the king; and which led to the deliverance of God’s people. No; there

are no accidents in the world that is presided over by a living, reigning God!

“There cometh a woman of Samaria to *draw water*.” To “draw water” was her object. She had no thought of anything else, save that she should not be seen. She stole forth at this hour of the midday sun because a woman of her character — shunned by other women — did not care to meet any one. The woman was unacquainted with the Savior. She had no expectation of meeting *Him*. She had no idea she would be converted that day — that was the last thing she would expect. Probably she said to herself, as she set forth, “No one will be at the well at this hour.” Poor desolate soul. But there was One there! One who was waiting for her — “sitting thus on the well.” He knew all about her. He knew her deep need, and He was there to minister to it. He was there to overcome her prejudices, there to subdue her rebellious will, there to invite Himself into her heart.

“Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink” (John 4:7). Link together these two statements: “Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey... Jesus *saith* unto her, Give me to drink.” There was everything to make Him “weary.” Here was the One who had been the center of Heaven’s glory, now dwelling in a world of sin and suffering. Here was the One in whom the Father delighted, now enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He had, in matchless grace, come “unto his own,” but with base indifference they “received him not.” He was not wanted here. The ingratitude and rebellion He met with, the jealousy and opposition of the Pharisees, the spiritual dullness of His own disciples — yes, there was everything to make Him “weary.” But, all praise to His peerless name, He never wearied in His ministry of grace. There was never any love of ease with Him: never the slightest selfishness: instead, nothing but one unbroken ministry of love. Fatigued in body He might be, sick at heart He must have been, but not too weary to seek out and save this sin-sick soul.

“Jesus said unto *her*.” How striking is the contrast between what we have here and what is found in the previous chapter! There we are shown Nicodemus coming to Christ “by night,” under cover of the darkness, so that he might guard his reputation. Here we behold the

Lord Jesus speaking to this harlot in the full light of day — it was midday. Verily, He “made himself of *no reputation!*”

“Jesus said unto her, Give me to drink.” The picture presented is unspeakably lovely. Christ seated on the well, and what do we find Him doing? Sitting alone with this poor outcast, to settle with her the great question of eternity. He shows her *herself*, and reveals *Himself!* This is exactly what He does with every soul that He calls to Himself. He takes us apart from the maddening world, exposes to us our desperate condition, and then makes known to us in whose Presence we are, leading us to ask from Him that precious “gift” which He alone can impart. Thus did He deal here with this Samaritan adulteress. And how this incident makes manifest the wondrous grace and infinite patience of the Savior in His dealings with sinners! Tenderly and patiently He led this woman, step by step, touching her heart, searching her conscience, awakening her soul to a consciousness of her deep need. And how this incident also brings out the depravity of the sinner — his spiritual blindness and obstinacy; his lack of capacity to understand and respond to the Savior’s advance; yea, his slowness of heart to believe!

“Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” The first thing the Savior did (note that He took the initiative) was to ask this woman for a drink of cold water — considered the very cheapest gift which this world contains. How the Son of God humbled Himself! Among the Jews it was considered the depth of degradation even to hold converse with the Samaritans; to be beholden to them for a favor would not be tolerated at all. But here we find the Lord of glory asking for a drink of water from one of the worst in this city of Samaritans! Such was His condescension that the woman herself was made to marvel.

“Give me to drink.” Here was the starting point for the Divine work of grace which was to be wrought in her. Every word in this brief sentence is profoundly significant. Here was no “ye must be.” The very first word the Savior uttered to this poor soul, was “give.” It was to *grace* He would direct her thoughts. “Give me,” He said. He immediately calls the attention of the sinner to Himself — “Give me.” But what was meant by “Give me to drink?” To what did the Savior refer? Surely there can be no doubt that His mind was on

something other than literal water, though, doubtless, the first and local significance of His words had reference to literal water. Just as the “weariness” of the previous verse has a deeper meaning than physical fatigue, so this “Give me to drink” signifies more than slaking His thirst. This world was a dry and thirsty land to the Savior, and the only refreshment He found here was in ministering His grace to poor needy sinners, and receiving from them their faith and gratitude in return. This is fully borne out in the sequel, for when the disciples returned and begged Him to eat, He said unto them, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of” (verse 32). When, then, the Savior said to this woman, “Give me to drink,” it was refreshment of spirit He sought.

“Give me to drink.” But how could she, a poor, despised and blinded sinner, “give” to Him? Ah, she could not. She must first ask of Him. She had to receive herself before she could give. In her natural state she had nothing. Spiritually she was Poverty-stricken; a bankrupt. And this it was that the Savior would press upon her, in order that she might be led to ask of Him. When, then, the Savior said, “Give me to drink,” He was making a demand of her with which, at this time, she was unable to comply. In other words, He was bringing her face to face with her helplessness. We are often told that God never commands us to do what we have no ability to perform, but He does, and that for two very good reasons: first, to awaken us to a sense of our *impotency*; second, that we might seek from Him the grace and strength we need to do that which is pleasing in His sight. What was the Law — that Law that was “holy, just and good” — given for? Its summarized requirements were, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... and thy neighbor as thyself.” But what man ever did this? What man could do it? Only one — the God-man. Why, then, was the Law given? On purpose to reveal man’s *impotency*. And why was that? To bring man to cast himself at the foot of God’s omnipotency:

“The things which are *impossible* with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

This is the first lesson in the school of God. This is what Christ would first teach this needy woman, verse 10 establishes that beyond a doubt — “Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou

knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him.” But it was the moral impossibility which Christ put before this woman that aroused her curiosity and interest.

“For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat”  
(John 4:8).

This was no mere coincidence, but graciously ordered by the providence of God. Christ desired this poor soul to be *alone* with Himself! This Gospel of John presents Christ in the very highest aspect in which we can contemplate Him, namely, as God manifest in the flesh, as the eternal Word, as Creator of all things, as the Revealer of the Father. And yet there is none of the four Gospels in which this glorious Person is so frequently seen alone with sinners as here in John. Surely there is Divine design in this. We see Him alone with Nicodemus; alone with this Samaritan woman; alone with the convicted adulteress in John 8; alone with the man whose eyes He had opened, and who was afterwards put out of the synagogue (John 9:35). Alone with God is where the sinner needs to get — with none between and none around him. This is one reason why the writer, during the course of four pastorates, never made use of an “inquiry room,” or “penitent form.” Another reason was, because he could find nothing resembling them in the Word of God. They are human inventions. No priest, no intermediary, is necessary. Bid the sinner retire by himself, and get alone with God and His Word.

“For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.” The word “buy” here points a contrast. Occurring just where it does it brings into relief the “gift” of God to which the Savior referred, see verses 10 and 14. Another has suggested to the writer that the action of the disciples here furnishes a striking illustration of 3 John 7: “taking nothing of the Gentiles.” These disciples of Christ did not beg, they bought.

“Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans”  
(John 4:9).

The Savior's request struck this woman with surprise. She knew the extreme dislike which Jews cherished towards Samaritans. It was accounted a sin for them to have any friendly intercourse with that people. The general tendency of this antipathy may be judged from the following extracts from the Jewish rabbins by Bishop Lightfoot: — It is prohibited to eat the bread, and to drink the wine of the Samaritan." "If any one receives a Samaritan into his house, and ministers to him, he will cause his children to be carried into captivity." "He who eats the bread of a Samaritan, is as if he ate swine's flesh."

Aware of this extreme antipathy, the Samaritan woman expresses her amazement that a person, whom, from His dress and dialect, she perceived to be a Jew, should deign to ask, much less receive a favor from a Samaritan — "How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" Ah, "little did she think," to borrow the words of one of the Puritans, "of the glories of Him who sat there before her. He who sat on the well owned a Throne that was placed high above the head of the cherubim; in His arms, who then rested Himself, was the sanctuary of peace, where weary souls could lay their heads and dispose their cares, and then turn them to joys, and to gild their thorns with glory; and from that holy tongue, which was parched with heat, should stream forth rivulets of heavenly doctrine, which were to water all the world, and turn deserts into a paradise" (Jeremy Taylor).

"Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me?" In a previous chapter we have pointed out the sevenfold contrast which exists between the cases of Nicodemus and this Samaritan woman. Here we call attention to a striking analogy. The very first word uttered by Nicodemus in response to the Savior's initial statements was "How?" (John 3:4); and the very first word of this woman in reply to Christ's request was "How?" Both of them met the advances of the Savior with a sceptical "How:" there were many points of dissimilarity between them, but in this particular they concurred. In His dealings with Nicodemus Christ manifests Himself as the "truth;" here in John 4 we behold the "grace" that came by Jesus Christ. "Truth" to break down the religious prejudices of a proud Pharisee; "grace" to meet the deep need of this Samaritan adulteress.

“We are full of ‘how’s.’ The truth of God, in all its majesty and authority, is put before us; we meet it with a how! The grace of God, in all its sweetness and tenderness, is unfolded to our view; we reply with a how? It may be a theological ‘how,’ or a rationalistic ‘how,’ it matters not, the poor heart will reason instead of believing the truth, and receiving the grace of God. The *will* is active, and hence, although the conscience may be ill at ease, and the heart be dissatisfied with itself, and all around, still the unbelieving ‘how’ breaks forth in one form or another. Nicodemus says, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ The Samaritan says, ‘How canst thou ask drink of me?’” (C. H. M., from whom we have taken several helpful thoughts).

Thus it is ever. When the Word of God declares to us the utter worthlessness of nature, the heart, instead of bowing to the holy record, sends up its unholy reasonings. When the same truth sets forth the boundless grace of God, and the free salvation which is in Christ Jesus, the heart, instead of receiving the grace, and rejoicing in the salvation, begins to reason as to how it can be. The fact is, the human heart is closed against God — against the truth of His Word, and against the grace of His heart. The Devil may speak and the heart will give its ready credence. Man may speak and the heart will greedily swallow what he says. Lies from Satan and nonsense from men all meet with a ready reception by the foolish sinner; but the moment God speaks, whether it be in the authoritative language of truth, or in the winsome accents of grace, all the return the heart will make is an unbelieving, rationalistic, infidelistic “How?” Anything and everything for the natural heart save the truth and grace of God. How deeply humbling all this is! How it ought to make us hide our faces with shame! How it should make us heed that solemn word in Ezekiel 16:62, 63,

“And thou shalt know that I am the Lord: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded... Because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.”

“Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?” How completely this manifested the *blindness* of the natural heart —

“*thou* being a *Jew*.” She failed to discern the excellency of the One talking to her. She knew not that it was the Lord of glory. She saw in Him nothing but a “Jew.” She was altogether ignorant of the fact that He who had humbled Himself to take upon Him the form of a servant, was none other than the Christ of God. And Christian readers, it was thus with each of us before the Holy Spirit quickened us. Until we were brought out of darkness into God’s marvelous light, we “saw in him no beauty that we should desire him.” All that this poor woman could think of was the *old prejudice* — “*thou* a Jew... me a woman of Samaria.” So it was with you and me. When the sinner first comes into the presence of God the latent enmity of the carnal mind is stirred up, and, until Divine grace has subdued us, all we could do was to prevaricate and raise objections.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest 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” (John 4:10).

Our Lord was not to be put off with her “how?” He had answered the “how” of Nicodemus, and He would now answer the “how” of this woman of Sychar. He replies to Nicodemus, eventually, by pointing to Himself as the great antitype of the brazen serpent, and by telling him of the love of God in sending His Son into the world. He replies to the woman, likewise, by telling her of “the *gift* of God?” It is beautiful to observe the spirit in which the Savior answered this poor outcast. He did not enter into an argument with her about the prejudices of the Samaritans, nor did He seek to defend the Jews for their heartless treatment of them. Nor did He deal roughly with her and reproach her for her woeful ignorance and stupidity. No; He was seeking her salvation, and with infinite patience He bore with her slowness of heart to believe.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the *gift* of God and *who* it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink.” There is where the root of the trouble lay. Man neither knows his need, nor the One who can minister to it. This woman was ignorant of “the *gift* of God.” The language of grace was an unknown tongue. Like every other sinner in his natural state, this Samaritan thought she was the one who must do the giving. But salvation does not come to us in

return for our giving. God is the Giver; all we have to do is receive. "If thou knewest the gift of God." What is this? It is salvation: it is eternal life: it is the "living water" spoken of by Christ at the end of the verse.

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink." But this woman did not know Who it was that spoke to her, nor of the marvelous condescension of this One who had asked her for a "drink." Had she done so, she, in turn, would have "asked of Him." He was ready to give, if she would but take the place of a receiver, and thus make Him the Giver; instead of her wanting to take the place of a giver and make Him the Receiver.

"Thou wouldest have asked of him." It is blessedly true that the only thing between the sinner and eternal life is an "ask." But asking proceeds from knowing. "If thou knewest... thou wouldest have asked." But O how reluctant the sinner is to take this place. God has to do much for him and in him before he is ready to really "ask." The sinner has to be brought to a realization of his awful condition and terrible danger: he must see himself as lost, undone, and bound for the lake of fire. He has to be made to see his desperate need of a Savior. Again, God has to show him the utter vanity and worthlessness of everything of this world, so that he experiences an acute "thirst" for the Water of Life. He has to be driven to despair, until he is made to wonder whether God can possibly save such a wretch as he. He has to be stript of the filthy rags of his own self-righteousness, and be made willing to come to God just as he is, as an empty-handed beggar ready to receive Divine charity. He has to really come into the presence of Christ and have personal dealings with Him. He has to make definite request for himself. This, in part, is what is involved, before the sinner will "ask." Before we ask, God has to deal with the conscience, enlighten the understanding, subdue the rebellious will, and open the heart, the door of which is fast closed against Himself. All of this is what Christ did with this woman of our lesson. We are not saved because of our seeking; we have to be sought. "And who it is that saith to thee:" notice, particularly, this "who it is," not "what it is" — it is not doctrine any more than doing. It is personal dealings with Christ that is needed; with Him who is the Source and Giver of "life."

Attention has often been called to the striking contrast in the manner of our Lord's speech with Nicodemus and His method of dealing with this poor Samaritan adulteress. The Lord did not deal with souls in any mechanical, stereotyped way, as it is to be feared many Christian-workers do today. No; He dealt with each according to the condition of heart they were in. Christ did not begin with the Gospel when dealing with Nicodemus. Instead, He said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." There is no good news in a "ye must be." If a man must be born again, what is he going to do in order that he may be? What does all his past life amount to? — no matter how full of deeds of benevolence, acts of kindness, and religious performances. Just nothing: a new beginning has to be made. But not only is an entirely different order of life imperative, but man has to be "born from above." What, then, can the poor sinner do in the matter? Nothing, absolutely nothing. To tell a man he "must be born again" is simply a shut door in the face of all fleshly pretensions; and that is precisely what Christ intended with Nicodemus.

But *why* shut the door before Nicodemus? It was because he belonged to the Pharisees. He was a member of that class, one of whom Christ portrayed as standing in the Temple and saying to God,

["I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers," etc. \(Luke 18:11\).](#)

Nicodemus was not only a highly respectable and moral man, but he was deeply religious. And what he most needed was just what he heard, for the Lord Jesus never made any mistakes. Nicodemus prided himself upon his respectability and religious standing: evidence of this is seen in his coming to Jesus "by night" — he was conscious of how much he risked by this coming; he feared he was endangering his reputation among the people by visiting this Nazarene. Therefore his self-righteousness must be smashed up; his religious pride must be broken down. The force, then, of what our Lord said to this ruler of the Jews was, "Nicodemus, with all your education and reformation, morality and religion, you have not begun to live that life which is pleasing to God, for *that* you must be born again." And this was simply to prepare the way for the Gospel; to prepare a self-righteous man to receive it.

How entirely different was our Lord's speech with this woman at the well! To her He never so much as mentions the need for the new birth; instead, He tells her at once of the "gift of God." In the case of this woman there was no legalistic and religious pattern to be swept away. Her moral character and religious standing were already gone. But it was far otherwise with Nicodemus. It is very evident that he felt he had something to stand upon and glory in. What he needed to know was that all of this in which he prided himself was worthless before God. Even though a master of Israel, he was utterly unfit to enter God's *kingdom*, and nothing could show him this quicker than for the Lord to say unto him "Ye must be born again."

Do what you will with nature, educate, cultivate, sublimate it as much as you please; raise it to the loftiest pinnacle of the temple of science and philosophy; summon to your aid all the ornaments and ordinances of the legal system, and all the appliances of man's religion; make vows and resolutions of moral reform; weary yourself out with the monotonous round of religious duties; betake yourself to vigils, fastings, prayers, and alms, and the entire range of "dead works," and after all, yonder Samaritan adulteress is as near to the kingdom of God as you, seeing that you as well as she "must be born again." Neither you nor she has one jot or tittle to present to God, either in the way of title to the kingdom, or of capacity to enjoy it. It is, and must be, all of grace, from beginning to end.

What, then, is the remedy? That to which Christ, at the close, pointed out to Nicodemus:

["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" \(John 3:14, 15\).](#)

But for whom was this brazen serpent intended? Why, for any bitten creature, just because he was bitten. The wound was the title. The title to what? To look at the serpent. And what then? He that looked, lived.

Blessed Gospel, "look and live." True for Nicodemus: true for the woman of Sychar: true for every sinbitten son and daughter of Adam. There is no limit, no restriction. The Son of Man has been

lifted up, that *whosoever looks to Him*, in simple faith, might have what Adam in innocency never possessed, and what the law of Moses never proposed, even “everlasting life.”

The Gospel meets men on a common platform. Nicodemus had moral character, social standing, religious reputation; the woman at the well had nothing. Nicodemus was at the top of the social ladder; she was at the bottom. You could hardly get anything higher than a “Master of Israel,” and you could scarcely get anything lower than a Samaritan adulteress; yet so far as standing before God, fitness for His holy presence, title to heaven was concerned, they were both on one common level. But how few understand this! So far as standing before God was concerned there was “no difference” between this learned and religious Nicodemus and the wretched woman of Sychar. To Nicodemus Christ said, “Ye must be born again;” this brief statement completely swept away the foundation from under his feet. Nothing less than a new nature was required from him; and nothing more was needed for her. Uncleaness could not enter heaven, nor could Phariseism. Each must be born again. True, there was a great difference morally and socially between Nicodemus and this woman — that goes without saying. No sensible person needs to be told that morality is better than vice, that sobriety is preferable to drunkenness, that it is better to be an honorable man than a thief. But none of these will save, or contribute anything toward the salvation of a sinner. None of these will secure admittance into the kingdom of God. Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan adulteress were dead; there was no more spiritual life in the one than in the other.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest 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.” There are some who regard the “living water” here as the Holy Spirit, and there is something to be said in favor of this view; but personally, while not dissenting from it, we think that more is included within the scope of our Lord’s words. We believe the “living water” has reference to salvation, salvation in its widest sense, with all that it embraces. The figure of “water” is most suggestive, and like all others which are found in Scripture calls for prayerful and prolonged meditation in order to discover its fulness and beauty. At least seven

lines of thought appear to be suggested by “water” — living water as a figure of the salvation which Christ gives.

1. Water is a gift from God. It is something which man, despite all his boasted wisdom, is quite unable to create. For water we are absolutely dependent upon God. It is equally so with His salvation, of which water is here a figure.
2. Water is something which is indispensable to man. It is not a luxury, but a vital necessity. It is that without which man cannot live. It is equally so with God’s salvation — apart from it men are eternally lost.
3. Water is that which meets a universal need; it is not merely a local requirement, but a general one. All are in need of water. It is so with God’s salvation. It is not merely some particular class of people, who are more wicked than their fellows, for all who are outside of Christ are lost.
4. Water is that which first *descends from the heavens*. It is not a product of the earth, but comes down from above. So is it with salvation: it is “of the Lord.”
5. Water is a blessed boon: it cools the fevered brow, slakes the thirst, refreshes and satisfies. And so does the salvation which is to be found in Christ.
6. Water is something of which we never tire. Other things satiate us, but not so with water. It is equally true of God’s salvation to the heart of every one who has really received it.
7. *Water is strangely and unevenly distributed by God*. In some places there is an abundance; in others very little; in others none at all. It is so with God’s salvation. In some nations there are many who have been visited by the Dayspring from on high; in others there are few who have passed from death unto life; while in others there seem to be none at all.

“He would have given thee living water.” How blessed this is! The living water is without money and without price: it is a “gift.” This gift can be obtained from Christ alone. This gift can be procured from Christ only by asking Him for it. How blessed the gift! How worldrous the Giver! How simple the terms! Here, then, was the Christ of God preaching to this poor fallen woman the Gospel of His grace. Here was the Messiah in Israel winning to Himself a despised Samaritan. This is hardly what we would have looked for. And how

the unexpected meets us again and again in these Gospels! How vastly different were things from what We had imagined them! Here was the Son of God, incarnate, born into this world; and where would we expect to find His cradle? Why, surely in Jerusalem, the “city of the great king.” Instead, He was born in Bethlehem, which was “little among the thousands in Judah.” Yes, born in Bethlehem, and cradled in a *manger* — the very last place we had looked for Him! And for what purpose has He visited this earth? To offer Himself as a sacrifice for sins. To whom shall we go to learn more about this? Surely, to the priests and Levites. Ah, and what do we learn about them in this Gospel? Why, they were the very ones who knew not the One who stood in their midst (John 1:26). No, if we would learn about Him who had come to be the great sacrifice, we must turn away from the priests and Levites, and go yonder into the “wilderness” — the last place, again, we would think of — and listen to that strange character clad in raiment of camel’s hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins; and he would tell us about the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Once more: suppose it had been worship we had desired to learn about, whither had we betaken ourselves? Why, surely, to the Temple — that, of all places, must be where the Lord God is worshipped in the truest form. But again would our quest have been in vain, for the Father’s house was now but “a house of merchandise.” Whom had we sought out for instruction in the things of God had been our desire? Why, surely, one of those best qualified to teach us would be Nicodemus, “a Master of Israel.” But again would we have met with disappointment.

Now if *we* would have gone to Nicodemus to learn of the things of God, who among us would have imagined these very truths being revealed by a weary Traveller by one of Samaria’s wells, to an audience of one! Who were the Samaritans to be privileged thus? Should we not expect to find this much — favored woman, and a people so highly honored, as being the descendants of some race of age-long seekers after God? Would we not conclude they must be the offspring of men who for long centuries had lived in one continued and supreme endeavor to purge their thoughts and ceremonies from every false and impure admixture? But read again 2 Kings 17 for the inspired account of the unlovely origin of the Samaritans. They were two-thirds heathen! Ah! after reading this

chapter would we not have expected to find worship in Jerusalem and *idolatry* in Samaria! Instead of which, we find idolatry in Jerusalem, and (before we are through with John 4) the true worship in Samaria. And what does all this go to prove? It shows that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. It demonstrates how utterly incompetent we are for drawing conclusions and reasoning about spiritual things. It exemplifies what was said long ago through Isaiah: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). How foolish are man’s reasonings; how wise God’s “foolishness!”

And here we must stop. In the next lesson we shall continue our study of this wondrous and blessed chapter. In the meantime, let the students prayerfully ponder the following questions: —

1. What particular trait of the sinner’s heart is manifested by the woman in the next statement? verse 11. — we do not mean her blindness or stupidity.
2. What spiritual truth did she unconsciously voice when she said, “the well is deep”? verse 11.
3. What God-dishonoring principle was enunciated by her in verse 12?
4. To what was Christ referring when He said, “this water”? verse 13.
5. How does verse 14 bring out the eternal security of the believer?
6. What did the woman mean by her words in verse 15?
7. Why did Christ say to her, “Go, call thy husband”? verse 16.

# JOHN 4:11-19

## CHRIST AT SYCHAR'S WELL (CONTINUED)

In viewing the Savior's conversation with this Samaritan woman as a sample case of God's gracious dealings with a sinner, we have seen, thus far: First, that the Lord took the initiative, being the first to speak. Second, that His first word to her was "Give" — directing her thoughts at once to grace; and that His next was "me" leading her to be occupied with *Himself*. Third, that He brings her face to face with her helplessness by asking her for a "drink," which in its deeper meaning, signified that He was seeking her faith and confidence to refresh His spirit. Fourth, this was met by an exhibition of the woman's prejudice, which, in principle, illustrated the enmity of the carnal mind against God. Fifth, Christ then affirmed that she was ignorant of the way of salvation and of His own Divine glory. Sixth, He referred to eternal life under the expressive figure of "living water." Seventh, He assured her that this living water was offered to her as a "gift," on the condition that she was to "ask" for it, and thus take the place of a receiver. This brief summary brings us to the end of verse 10, and from that point we will now proceed, first presenting an Analysis of the verses which immediately follow: —

1. The Woman's Ignorance, verse 11.
2. The Woman's Insolence, verse 12.
3. The Savior's Gracious Promise, verses 13, 14.
4. The Woman's Prejudice Overcome, verse 15.
5. The Savior's Arrow for the Conscience, verse 16.
6. The Savior's Omniscience Displayed, verses 17, 18.
7. The Woman's Dawning Perception, verse 19.

As we read the first section of this blessed narrative we were struck with the amazing condescension of the Lord of Glory, who so humbled Himself as to converse with this fallen woman of Samaria. Now, as we turn to consider the section which follows, we cannot fail to be impressed with the wondrous patience of the Savior. He had invited this wretched creature to ask from Him, and He promised to give her living water; but instead of promptly closing

with His gracious offer, the woman continued to raise objections. But Christ did not turn away in disgust, and leave her to suffer the merited results of her waywardness and stubbornness; He bore with her stupidity, and with Divine long-sufferance wore down her opposition, and won her to Himself.

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?” (John 4:11).

Four things are brought out by this statement.

**First**, her continued blindness to the glory of Him who addressed her.

**Second**, her occupation with material things.

**Third**, her concentration on the means rather than the end.

**Fourth**, her ignorance of the Source of the “living water.” Let us briefly consider each of these separately.

In verse 9 we find that this woman referred to Christ as “a Jew.” In replying, the Savior reproached her for her ignorance by saying, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him” (verse 10). It is true she had never before met the Lord Jesus, but this did not excuse her. It was because she was blind that she saw in Him no beauty that she should desire Him. And it is only unbelief which prevents the sinner today from recognizing in that One who died upon the cross the Son of God, and the only One who could save him from his sins. And unbelief is not a thing to be pitied, but blamed. But now that Christ had revealed Himself as the One who dispensed the “gift” of God, the Samaritan woman only answered, “Sir, *Thou* hast nothing to draw with!” Poor woman, how little she knew as yet the Divine dignity of that One who had come to seek and to save that which was lost. How complete was her blindness. And how accurately does she picture our state by nature. Exactly the same was our condition when God, in infinite mercy, began His dealings with us — our eyes were closed to the perfections of His beloved Son, and “we hid as it were our faces from him.”

“Sir, thou hast nothing to *draw* with.” How this shows the trend of her thoughts. Her mind was centered upon wells and buckets! And this, again, illustrates a principle of general application. This woman is still to be viewed as a representative character. Behold in her an accurate portrayal of the sinner, as we see her mind concentrated upon *material* things. Her mind was occupied with the world — its duties and employments — and hence she could not rise to any higher thoughts: she could not discern who it was that addressed her, nor what He was offering. And thus it is with all who are of the world: they are kept away from the things of Christ by the things of time and sense. The Devil uses just such things to keep the soul from the Savior.

“Let it be what it may, let it be only a waterpot, he cares not, so long as it occupies the mind to the exclusion of the knowledge of Christ. He cares not for the instrument, so long as he gains his own ends, to draw the mind away from the apprehension of spiritual things. It may be pleasure, it may be amusement, gain, reputation, family duties, lawful employments, so that it keeps the soul from fixing on Christ. This is all he wants. A water-pot will serve his purpose, just as well as a palace, so that he can blind them, *lest* the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (J. N. Darby, from whom we have extracted other thoughts, embodied in our exposition above and below).

Ah! dear friend, Is there anything which has thus been keeping you away from Christ — from seeking His great salvation, and obtaining from Him the “living water?” That thing may be quite innocent and harmless, yea, it may be something praise worthy in itself. Even lawful employments, family duties, may keep a soul from the Savior, and hinder you from receiving His priceless gift. Satan is very subtle in the means he employs to blind the mind. Did you ever notice that in the Parable of the Sower the Lord tells us that the things which “choke the Word” are “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22)?

Should an unsaved soul read these lines we ask you to *see yourself* in the case of this woman, as far as we have yet considered it. Her thoughts were on the purpose which had brought her to the well — a

lawful and necessary purpose, no doubt, but one which occupied her mind to the exclusion of the things of Christ! She could think of nothing but wells and buckets — she was, therefore, unable to discern the love, the grace, the winsomeness of that blessed One who sought her salvation. And how many a man there is today so busily occupied with making a living for his family, and how many a woman so concerned with the duties of the home — lawful and necessary things — that Christ and His salvation are *crowded out*! So it was with this Samaritan woman. She thought only of her bodily need: her mind was centered on the common round of daily tasks. And thus it is with many another now. They are too busy to take time to study the things of God. They are too much occupied with their “waterpots” to listen to the still small voice of God.

“Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with.” These words illustrate another principle which, in its outworkings, stands between many a sinner and salvation. The woman’s mind was centered on *means*, rather than the end. She was occupied with something to “draw with,” rather than with Christ. And how many today are concerned far more with their own efforts and doings than with the Savior Himself. And even where their eyes are not upon their own works, they are frequently turned to the evangelist, or to the ‘inquiry room,’ or ‘the mourner’s bench.’ And where this is not the case, the Devil will get them occupied with their own repentance and faith. Anything, so long as he can keep the poor sinner from looking to *Christ alone*.

And, too, we may observe how this woman was *limiting* Christ to the use of means. She supposed He could not provide the “living water” unless He had something to “draw with.” And how many imagine they cannot be saved except in some ‘Revival Meetings,’ or at least in a church-house. But when it pleases God to do so, He acts independently of all means (the Word excepted). When He desires to create a world, He speaks and it is done! He rains manna from heaven; furnishes water out of the rock, and supplies honey from the carcass of the lion!

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?” She continues to raise objections, and press her questions. No sooner had

the Lord answered one than she brings forward another. The Lord had replied to her “How?” by telling of the “gift” of God, the “living water.” Now she asks “Whence?” this was to be obtained. She knew not the Source from whence this “living water” proceeded. All she knew was that the well was deep.

“The well is deep.” And there is a deep meaning in these words. The well is deep — far deeper than our hands can reach down to. From whence then shall man obtain the “living water?” *How* shall he procure “eternal life?” By keeping the Law? Nay, verily, for “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified” (Romans 3:20). Is it by cultivating the best that is within us by nature? No, for “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). Is it by living up to the light we have, and doing the best we know how? No, for we are “without strength” (Romans 5:6). What then? Ah! dear reader, listen: This “living water” is not a wage to be earned, a prize to be sought, a crown to be won. No; it is a gift, God’s free gift in Christ:

“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23);

yes; the well is deep. Into awful depths of suffering had the Savior to descend before the life-giving Water could be furnished to sinners.

“Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” (John 4:12).

As another has said, “How little she knew, as yet, of the One she was addressing. The well might be deep, but there is something deeper still, even her soul’s deep need; and something deeper than that again, even the grace that had brought Him down from heaven to meet her need. But so little did she know of Him, that she could ask, ‘Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well?’ She knew not that she was speaking to Jacob’s God — to the One who had formed Jacob and given him all that he ever possessed. She knew nothing of this. Her eyes were yet closed, and this was the true secret of her ‘How?’ and ‘Whence?’”

How much this explains! When we find people asking questions, unbelieving questions, concerning the things of God, it is a sure sign

that they need to have their eyes opened. The rationalist, the critic, and the infidel are blind. It is their very blindness that causes them to ask questions, raise difficulties, and create doubts, They deem themselves very clever, but they do only exhibit their folly. However, in the case of this Samaritan woman her questions proceeded not from a bold infidelity, but from nature's blindness and ignorance, and therefore the Lord dealt patiently with her. He knew how to silence a rationalist, and oftentimes He dismissed a carping critic in a summary manner. But there were also occasions when, in marvelous condescension and gracious patience, He waited on an ignorant inquirer for the purpose of resolving his difficulties and removing his fears. And thus it was at the well at Sychar. He was not to be put off with her quibbling, nor could He be wearied by her dullness. He bore with her (as He did with each of us) in marvelous longsufferance, and left her not until He had fully met the deep need of her soul by the revelation of Himself.

“Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself?” Once again we may discover here a deeper significance than what appears on the surface. Attention is called to the *antiquity* of the well from which Jacob and his children drank. Beautiful is the underlying spiritual lesson. The “well” is as old as man the sinner. The salvation of which the “water” of this “well” speaks, had refreshed the hearts of Abel and Enoch, Noah and Abraham, and all the Old Testament saints. God has had but one way of salvation since sin entered the world. Salvation has always been by grace, through faith, altogether apart from human works. The Gospel is no novelty: it was “preached before unto Abraham” (Galatians 3:8). Yea, it was preached to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when, clothing our fallen first parents with coats of skins (Genesis 3:21), God made known the fact “without shedding of blood is no remission,” and that through the death of an innocent substitute a covering was provided which fitted the guilty and the defiled to stand unabashed in the presence of the thrice holy One, because “accepted in the Beloved.”

“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again” (John 4:13).

The Lord Jesus was not to be put off. He was determined to reveal Himself to this sin-sick soul. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." The seat of the "thirst" within man lies too deep for the waters of this earth to quench. The "thirst" of man's soul is a spiritual one, and that is why material things are unable to slake it. Earth's deepest well may be fathomed and drained, and the needy soul remain thirsty after all. Men and women may take their fill of pleasure, yet will it fail to satisfy. They may surround themselves with every comfort and luxury that wealth can provide, and the heart still be empty. They may court the honors of the world, and climb to the highest pinnacle of human fame, but the plaudits of men will leave an aching void behind them. They may explore the whole realm of philosophy and science, until they become as wise as Solomon, but like Israel's king of old, they will discover that all under the sun is only "vanity and vexation of spirit." Over all the wells of this world's providing must be written, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

This is true not only of the material, the mental, and the social realms, but of the religious, too. Man may awaken within us certain desires, but he cannot satisfy them. Man may exhort and persuade, and we may make resolutions, amend our lives, become very religious, and yet "thirst again." The religious systems of human manufacture hold not the Water of Life. They do but disappoint. Nothing but the "living water" can quench our thirst and satisfy our hearts, and only *Christ* can give this.

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall *thirst again*." What an awful illustration of this is furnished in Luke 16. There the Savior sets before us a man clothed in purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day. He drank deeply of the wells of this passing world; but he thirsted again. O see him, as the Son of God lifts the veil which hides the unseen; see him lifting up his eyes in hell-torments, craving, but craving in vain, a single drop of water to cool his parched tongue. There is not as much as a drop of water in hell! There he thirsts, and the unspeakably dreadful thing is that he will thirst. Fearfully solemn is this for all; but perfectly appalling for the children of ease and luxury, and they who spend their time going from well to well of this world, and giving no serious thought to an eternity of burning in the lake of fire. O that it may please God to

cause some such to give these lines a thoughtful consideration, and arrest their attention, and lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Giver of that living water of which whosoever drinketh shall never thirst.

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (John 4:14).

Here is satisfaction to the soul. The one who has *asked* and *received* is now satisfied. The Lord goes on to say, “but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The believer now has a well of living water within, ever fresh, ever flowing, ever springing up toward its native source, for water always seeks its own level. But let us weigh each expression. “Whosoever drinketh.” What is drinking? It is ministering to a felt need. It is a personal act of appropriation. It is a taking into myself that which was, previously, without me. “Of the water that I shall give him.” This “water” is “eternal life,” and this is not bought or won, but is received as a “gift,” for the “gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” “Shall never thirst:” here the Lord speaks according to the fulness of the gift bestowed: as to our *enjoyment* of it, that is conditioned upon the way in which faith maintains us in fellowship with the Giver. “Never thirst” denotes a satisfying portion. “Never thirst” argues the eternal security of the recipient. Were it possible for a believer to forfeit salvation through unworthiness, this verse would not be true, for every lost soul will “thirst,” thirst forever in hell. “Shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”: this “gift,” this “living water,” is a present possession, imparted by grace, and is something within the believer.

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” To borrow again the language of the eloquent Puritan: “Here we labor, but receive no benefit; we sow many times, and reap not; we reap, and we do not gather in; or gather in, and do not possess; or possess and do not enjoy; or if we enjoy, we are still unsatisfied: it is with anguish of spirit and circumstances of vexation. A great heap of riches makes neither our clothes more warm, our meat more nutritive, nor our beverage more palatable. It feeds the eye but never fills it. Like drink to a person suffering from

dropsy, it increases the thirst and promotes the torment. But the grace of God fills the furrows of the heart; and, as the capacity increases, it grows itself in equal degrees, and never suffers any emptiness or dissatisfaction, but carries contentment and fulness all the way; and the degrees of augmentation are not steps and near approaches to satisfaction, but increasings of the capacity. The soul is satisfied all the way, and receives more, not because it wanted any, but that it can now hold the more, being become more receptive of felicity; and in every minute of sanctification, there is so excellent a condition of joy that the very calamities, afflictions, and persecutions of the world, are turned into felicities by the activity of the prevailing ingredient: like a drop of water falling into a tun of wine, it is ascribed into a new form, losing its own nature by a conversion in one more noble. These were the waters which were given us to drink, when, with the rod of God, the Rock, Christ Jesus, was smitten. The Spirit of God moves forever upon these waters; and, when the angel of the covenant had stirred the pool, whosoever descends hither shall find health and peace, joys spiritual, and the satisfaction of eternity” (Jeremy Taylor).

“The woman saith unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15).

She is still more or less in the dark. The natural mind is occupied with natural things, and it contemplates everything through that medium; it is confined to its own little circle of feelings and ideas; and can neither see nor feel anything beyond it; it lives in its own cramped realm, finds there its own enjoyment and employment, and if left to itself, will live and die there. Poor woman! The Savior of sinners was before her, but she knew Him not. He was speaking words of grace to her, but as yet, she did not fully comprehend. He had asked for a drink, and she had replied with a “*How?*” He had told her of God’s gift, and she had replied with a “*Whence?*” He had spoken of an everlasting well, and she seeks only to be spared the trouble of coming hither to draw.

And yet while all that we have just said above is no doubt true, nevertheless, as we take a closer look at this last statement of the woman, we may detect signs more hopeful. Her words afford evidence that the patient dealing of Christ with her was not in vain,

yea, that light was beginning to illumine her darkened understanding. Note, she now appropriates His word, and says, “Sir, *give* me to drink.” Relief from daily toil was, no doubt, the thought uppermost in her mind; yet, and mark it well, she was now *willing* to be indebted to a “Jew” for that! There was still much ignorance; but her prejudice was being overcome; her heart was being won. What, then, is the next step? Why, her *conscience* must be reached. A sense of need must be created. And how is this accomplished? By a conviction of sin. The first thought in connection with salvation, the prime meaning of the word itself, is that of deliverance from something. Salvation implies danger, and the sinner will not flee to Christ as a Refuge from the wrath to come until a due sense (not merely of wretchedness, but) of guilt is upon him. There can be no blessing till there is conviction and confession of sin. It is not until we discover our case to be truly desperate that we betake ourselves to Christ — until then, we attempt to prescribe for ourselves. Herein lies the force of the Savior’s next word.

“Jesus said unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither”  
(John 4:16).

It is strange that so many have missed the point of this. A little meditation will surely discern not only the solemnity, but the blessedness, of this word from the Savior, to the woman whose heart was slowly opening to receive Him. It is mainly a matter of finding the proper emphasis. Two things the Lord bade her do: the first was solemn and searching; the second gracious and precious. “Go,” He said, “call thy husband” — that was a word addressed to her conscience. “And *come hither*” — that was a word for her heart. The force of what He said was this: If you really want this living water of which I have been telling you, you can obtain it only as a poor, convicted, contrite sinner. But not only did He say “Go,” but He added “Come.” She was not only to go and call her husband, but she was to come back to Christ *in her true character*. It was a marvelous mingling of “grace” and “truth.” Truth for her conscience; grace for her heart. Truth which required her to come out into the light of her proper character, as a self-confessed sinner; grace which invited her to return to the Savior’s side. Well may we admire the wonderful ways of Him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

“The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus saith 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” (John 4:17, 18).

How this exhibits the Deity of Christ! He revealed His omniscience. He knew all about this woman — her heart, her life, her very thoughts; nothing could be hid from Him. She might be a complete stranger to Him in the flesh, yet was He thoroughly acquainted with her. It was the same with Peter: the Savior knew him thoroughly the first time they met, see John 1:42 and our comments thereon. So, too, He saw Nathanael under the fig tree before he came to Him. And so, dear reader, He knows all about you. Nothing can be concealed from His all-seeing eye. But this will not trouble you if everything has been brought out into the light, and confessed before Him.

“The woman saith unto Him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (John 4:19).

A “prophet” is God’s spokesman. This poor soul now recognized the voice of *God*. He had spoken more deeply than any man to her soul. The Divine arrow of conviction had pierced her conscience, and the effect is striking: “I perceive.” Her eyes were beginning to open: she sees something. She discovers herself to be in the presence of some mysterious personage whom she owns as God’s spokesman. It was through her conscience the light began to enter! And it is ever thus. O dear reader, have you experienced this for yourself? Has your conscience been in the presence of that Light which makes all things manifest? Have you seen yourself as guilty, undone, lost, Christless, hell-deserving? Has the arrow ever entered your conscience? Christ has various arrows in His quiver. He had an arrow for Nicodemus, and He had an arrow for this adulteress. They were different arrows, but they did their work.

“He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest” (John 3:21)

was the arrow for the master in Israel. “Go, call thy husband” was His arrow for this Samaritan woman. The question of sin and

righteousness must be settled in the presence of God. Has, then, this vital and all- important matter been settled between *your soul* and God? If so, you will be able to appreciate the sequel — the remainder of this wonderful and blessed narrative.

There is a principle here of great importance to the believer. An exercised conscience precedes intelligence in the things of God. Spiritual illumination comes through the heart more than through the mind. They who are most anxious to have a better understanding of the Holy Oracles need to pray earnestly for God to put His fear upon them, that they may be more careful in avoiding the things that displease Him. One of our deepest needs is a more sensitive conscience. In Hebrews 5:11-13 we read of those who were “dull of hearing” and incapacitated to receive the deeper things of God. “Dullness of hearing” does not mean they were suffering from a stupefied mind, but rather from a calloused conscience. The last verse of Hebrews 5 speaks of those who were qualified to receive the deeper truths: “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use *have their senses exercised* to discern both good and evil.” Thus, it was for our learning that we are shown that perception spiritual things came to the Samaritan woman through, and as the result of, a conscience active in the presence of God.

As preparation for the next lesson we ask the interested reader to ponder the following questions: —

What is signified by “salvation is of the Jews”? verse 22.

1. What is meant by worshipping “in spirit and in truth”? verse 24.
2. Make a careful study of passages both in the Old and New Testaments which speak of “worship.”
3. What is implied by the woman’s words in verse 25?
4. What constrained the disciples to remain silent? verse 27.
5. What is the force of the “then” in verse 28?
6. What principle is illustrated by the woman leaving her waterpot?

# JOHN 4:20-30

## CHRIST AT SYCHAR'S WELL (CONCLUDED)

In the last chapter we continued our exposition of John 4 down to the end of verse 19. It is of surpassing interest to follow the course of the Savior's dealings with the poor Samaritan adulteress — the Divine patience, the infinite grace and tenderness, the faithful application of the truth to her heart and conscience. We have been struck, too, with the expose of human depravity which this instance furnishes: not simply with the dissolute life of the woman, but with her prejudice, her stupidity, her occupation with material things, her procrastination — all so many exhibitions of what is in us by nature:

“As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Proverbs 27:19.)

In the attitude of this sinner toward Christ we see an accurate portrayal of our own past history. Let us now resume at the point where we left off in our last.

We append an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The place of worship, verses 20, 21.
2. Worshipers sought by the Father, verses 22, 23.
3. The character of acceptable worship, verse 24.
4. The woman's desire for Christ, verse 25.
5. Christ fully reveals Himself, verse 26.
6. The disciples' surprise and silence, verse 27.
7. The gratitude and zeal of a saved soul, verses 28-30.

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20).

This woman was not regenerated, though she was on the very eve of being so. She was at that point where it is always very difficult (if not impossible) for us to determine on which side of the line a person stands. Regeneration is an instantaneous act and experience, but preceding it there is a process, sometimes brief, usually more or

less protracted. During this process or transitional stage there is a continual conflict between the light and the darkness, and nothing is very clearly defined. There is that which is the fruit of the Spirit's operations, and there is that which springs from the activities of the flesh. We may detect both of these at this point in John 4.

In the previous verse the woman had said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." This evidenced the fact that light was beginning to illumine her understanding: there was the dawning of spiritual intelligence. But immediately following this we discover the workings of the flesh — "*Our* fathers worshipped in this mountain; and *ye* say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Here was the enmity of the carnal mind showing itself again. It was a return to the old prejudice, which was voiced at the commencement of conversation — see verse 9. The subject of *where* to worship was one of the leading points of contention between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Lord had introduced a very disquieting theme. He had spoken directly to her conscience; He had been convicting of Sin. And when a sinner's conscience is disturbed, instinctively he seeks to throw it off. He endeavors to turn aside the sharp point of the accusing shaft, by occupying his mind with other things.

There is little doubt that this woman raised the subject of worship at this stage for the purpose of diverting a theme of conversation which was far from agreeable or creditable to her. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet," she had said, and so, glad of an opportunity to shift the discourse from a subject so painful, she introduces the great point of controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans, that she might hear His opinion respecting it. And, too, this woman was really interested in the friendly advances of this mysterious Stranger who had spoken to her so graciously and yet so searchingly: and doubtless she was anxious to know how He would decide the age-long dispute. It is no uncommon thing for persons living in sin, not merely to pretend, but really to *have* an interest in, and a zeal for, what they term 'religion.' Speculation about points in theology is frequently found in unnatural union with habitual neglect of moral duty. Ofttimes a sinner seeks protection from shafts of conviction which follow the plain violation of the law of God, by discussions respecting orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Ah! "who can understand the

errors” of that deceitful and desperately wicked thing, the human heart!

In this question of the woman we may discover an underlying principle of general application. Her conscience had been exercised over sin, in the presence of God, and the effect upon her, as upon most quickened souls, was to be concerned with the matter of “worship” — where to worship is the question which now engages the attention. Really, it is only self again in one of its ten thousand forms. First the sinner is conscious of his prejudice; then he is occupied with his sins; then he turns to his own repentance and faith; and then where to worship — anything but Christ Himself! So it was with this woman here. The Lord had pointed out what it was that kept her from asking for the “gift of God,” namely, *ignorance*. True, she was clear on some points. She was versed in the contention between the Jews and the Samaritans; she had been instructed in the difference between Jerusalem and Gerizim; she knew all about “father Jacob.” But there were two things she did not know: “The gift of God” and “who it was that was speaking to her.” As yet she knew not Christ as the all-sufficient Savior for lost sinners. Her mind was engaged with the problem of where to worship.

Was it not thus with most of us? Following our first awakening, were we not considerably exercised over the conflicting claims of the churches and denominations? Where ought I to worship? Which denomination shall I join? In which church shall I seek membership? Which is the most scriptural of the different sects? These are questions which the majority of us faced, and probably many sought the solution of these problems long before they had found rest in the finished work of Christ. After all it was only another ‘refuge’ in which we sought shelter from the accusing voice which was convicting us of our lost condition.

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that *in Jerusalem* is the place where men ought to worship” — some worship here; some worship there; where *ought* we to worship? Important as this question is, it is not one to be discussed by a convicted sinner. The all-important thing for him is to find himself in the presence of the revealed Savior. Let this be deeply pondered,

clearly understood, and carefully borne in mind. “A convicted sinner can never become a devoted saint, until he finds his happy place at the feet of a revealed Savior” (C. H. M.).

Irreparable damage has been done to souls by occupying them with churches and denominations, instead of with a Savior-God. If the sinner joins a church before he has received Christ he is in greater danger than he was previously. The church can neither save nor help to save. Many regard the church as a stepping stone *to* Christ, and frequently they find it but a stumbling-stone away *from* Christ. No stepping stones to Christ are needed. He has come all the way from heaven to earth, and is so near to us that no stepping stones are required. Mark how strikingly this is illustrated in one of the Old Testament types:

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon” (Exodus 20:24-26).

It is to be noted that these instructions concerning “the altar” follow immediately on the giving of the Law, for it foreshadowed that which was to succeed the Legal dispensation, namely, the Cross of Christ, on which the great Sacrifice was offered. Note also it was expressly prohibited that the altar of stone should not be built from hewn stones. The stones must have no human tools lifted up upon them; no human labor should enter into their preparation. Neither were there to be any steps up to God’s altar. Any attempt to climb up to God will only expose our shame. Indeed, steps up are not necessary for us, for the Lord Jesus took all the steps down to where we lay in our guilt and helplessness.

What stepping-stone did this woman of Samaria require? None at all, for Christ was there by her side, though she knew Him not. He was patiently dislodging her from every refuge in which she sought

to take shelter. He was seeking to bring her to the realization that she was a great sinner, and He a great Savior, come down here in marvelous grace to save her, not only from the guilt and penalty of sin, but also from its dominion and power. What could “this mountain,” or that “Jerusalem” do for her? Was it not obvious that a prior question, of paramount importance, claimed her serious attention, namely, What she was to do with her sins? — how she was to be saved? What relief could places of worship afford her burdened heart and guilty conscience? Could she find salvation in Gerizim? Could she procure peace in Jerusalem’s temple? Could she worship the Father in spirit and in truth in either the one or the other? Was it not plain that she needed salvation before she could worship anywhere?

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21).

The Lord turned her attention to a subject of infinitely greater importance than the place of worship, even the nature of acceptable worship; assuring her that the time was at hand when controversies respecting the place of worship would be obsolete. “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.” The meaning of this evidently is that “The time is just at hand when the public worship of God the Father should not be confined to any one place, and when the controversy as to whether Jerusalem or Gerizim had the better claim to that honor would be superceded.”

“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

Here we see ‘truth’ mingling with ‘grace.’ Christ not only dealt in faithfulness. He was, and is, “the faithful and true witness.” The Lord, in a very brief word, settled the disputed point — the Samaritans were wrong, the Jews right; the former were ignorant, the latter well instructed. Christ then added a reason to what He had just said — “for salvation is of the Jews.” We take it that “salvation” here is equivalent to “the Savior,” that is, the Messiah. In this way was the word used by Simeon —

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,  
according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy  
salvation”  
(Luke 2:29, 30).

So, too, the word was used by John the Baptist,

“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6).

The force then of Christ’s declaration was this: The Savior, the Messiah, is to arise from among the Jews, and therefore the true worship of Jehovah is to be found among them.

It may be inquired, Why should the Lord Jesus refer to Himself under the impersonal word “salvation”? A moment’s reflection will show the propriety of it. Christ was continuing to press upon this woman the fact that she was a sinner, and therefore it was useless to occupy her mind with questions about places of worship. What she needed was salvation, and this salvation could only be had through the knowledge of God revealed as Father, in the face of Jesus Christ. Such is the ground, and the only ground, of true spiritual worship. In order to worship the Father we must know Him; and to know Him is salvation, and salvation is eternal life.

What a lesson is there here for every Christian worker respecting the manner to deal with anxious souls. When we are speaking to such, let us not occupy them with questions about sects and parties, churches and denominations, creeds and confessions. It is positively cruel to do so. What they need is salvation — to know God, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us shut them up to this one thing, and refuse to discuss anything else with them until they have received the Savior. Questions about church — membership, the ordinances, etc., have their place and interest; but manifestly they are not for convicted sinners. Too many are so foolishly anxious to swell the ranks of their party, that they are in grave danger of thinking more about getting people to join them than they are about leading anxious souls simply and fully to Christ. Let us study diligently the example of the perfect Teacher in His dealings with the woman of Sychar.

“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” (John 4:23).

Here is the point which the Lord now presses upon this anxious soul. A new order of things was about to be established, and under it God would be manifested not as Jehovah (the covenant-keeping God) but as “the Father,” and then the great question would not be where to worship, but how. Then the worshipper at Jerusalem will not be accounted the true worshipper because he worships there, nor the worshipper at Gerizim the false worshipper because he worships there; the one who worships in spirit and in truth, no matter where he may worship, he and he alone is the genuine worshipper.

To “worship in *spirit*,” is to worship spiritually; to “worship in *truth*,” is to worship truly. They are not two different kinds of worship, but two aspects of the same worship. To worship spiritually is the opposite of mere external rites which pertained to the flesh; instead, it is to give to God the homage of an enlightened mind and an affectionate heart. To worship Him truly is to worship Him according to the Truth, in a manner suited to the revelation He has made of Himself; and, no doubt, it also carries with it the force of worshipping truly, not in pretense, but sincerely. Such, and such alone, are the acceptable worshippers.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

This is a most important verse and treats of a most important but sadly misunderstood subject, namely, that of worship. Much of that which is termed “worship” today is fleshly rather than spiritual, and is external and spectacular, rather than internal and reverential. What are all the ornate decorations in our church-houses for? the stained glass windows, the costly hangings and fittings, the expensive organs! But people at once reply, ‘But God’s house must be beautiful, and He surely loves to have it so.’ But why will not such objectors be honest, and say, ‘We love to have it so, and therefore, God should too?’ Here, as everywhere else, God’s thoughts are entirely different from man’s. Look at the tabernacle which was made according to the pattern which Jehovah Himself showed to Moses in the mount! ‘Yes,’ people reply, ‘but look at Solomon’s

temple!’ Ah, Solomon’s, truly. But look at it, and what do we see? Not one stone left upon another! Ah, dear reader, have you ever stopped to think what the future holds for this world and all its imposing structures? The world, and all that is therein, will be burned up! Not only the saloons and the picture shows, but also its magnificent cathedrals and stately churches, erected at enormous expense, while half of the human race was hastening to the Lake of Fire without any knowledge of Christ! Does this burning up of them look as though God esteemed them very highly? And if His people pondered this, would they be so ready to put so much of their money into them? After all, is it not the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye — denominational pride — which lies behind it all?

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Note how emphatic this is — MUST. There is no alternative, no choice in the matter. This must is final. There are three “musts” in this Gospel, equally important and unequivocal. In John 3:7 we read, “Ye *must* be born again.” In John 3:14, “The Son of man *must* be lifted up.” In John 4:24, “God *must* be worshipped in spirit and in truth.” It is indeed striking to observe that the first of these has reference to the work of God the Spirit, for He is the One who effects the new birth. The second “must” has reference to God the Son, for He was the One who had to die in order for atonement to be made. The third “must” respects God the Father, for He is the object of worship, the One who “seeketh” worshippers. And this order cannot be changed. It is only they who have been regenerated by God the Spirit, and justified by the Atonement of God the Son, who can worship God the Father.

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord”  
(Proverbs 15:8).

*What is worship?* We answer: First, it is the *action of the new nature* seeking, as the sparks fly upward, to return to the Divine and heavenly source from which it came. Worship is one of the three great marks which evidences the presence of the new nature —

“We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3)

in the Greek there is no article before “spirit” or flesh;” the spirit refers to the new nature, which is born of the Spirit.

In the second place, worship is the activity of a redeemed people. Israel did not worship Jehovah in Egypt; there they could only “sigh,” and “cry,” and “groan” (see Exodus 2:23, 24). It was not until Israel had passed through the Red Sea that we are told “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, *I will sing unto the Lord*” (Exodus 15:1); and note, this was the Song of Redemption — the words “redeemed” and “redemption” are not found in Scripture until this chapter is reached: see verse 13.

In the third place, worship *proceeds from the heart*.

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. *But in vain do they worship me*” (Matthew 15:8, 9).

Worship is a redeemed heart occupied with God, expressing itself in adoration and thanksgiving. Read through the Redemption Song, expression of Israel’s worship, in Exodus 15, and notice the frequent repetition of “Thou,” “Thee,” and “He.” Worship, then, is the occupation of the heart with a known God; and everything which attracts the flesh and its senses, detracts from real worship.

“God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” There is no choice in the matter. This emphatic “must” bars out everything which is of the flesh. Worship is not by the eyes or the ears, but “in spirit,” that is, from the *new nature*. The more spiritual is our worship the less formal and the less attractive to the flesh will it be. O how far astray we have gone! Modern “worship” (?) is chiefly designed to render it pleasing to the flesh: a ‘bright and attractive service’, with beautiful surroundings, sensuous music, and entertaining talks. What a mockery and a blasphemy! O that we all would heed that pointed word in Psalm 89:7;

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him”

how different things would then be.

Is a choir needed to 'lead' worship? What choir was needed to aid the Savior and His apostles as they sung that hymn in the upper room, ere going forth into the Garden? (Matthew 26:30). What choir was needed to assist the apostles, as with bleeding backs they sang praises to God in the Philippian dungeon? Singing to be acceptable to God must come from the heart. And to *whom* do the choirs sing — to God, or to the people? The attractiveness of singing has been substituted for "the foolishness of preaching." The place which music now holds in many of our public services is a solemn "sign of the times" to those who have eyes to see. But is music wrong? Has not God Himself bestowed the gift? Surely, but what we are now complaining about is church-singing that is professional and spectacular, that which is of the flesh, and rendered to please the ear of man. The only music which ever passes beyond the roof of the church in which it is rendered is that which issues from born again people, who "sing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord."

"God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." We must worship "in spirit," and not merely with the physical senses. We cannot worship by admiring grand architecture, by listening to the peals of a costly organ or the anthems of a highly trained choir. We cannot worship by gazing at pictures, smelling of incense, counting of beads. We cannot worship with our eyes or ears, noses or hands, for they are all "flesh," and not "spirit." Moreover, spiritual worship must be distinguished sharply from *soulical* worship, though there are few today who discriminate between them. Much, very much, of our modern so-called worship is soulical, that is, emotional. Music which makes one "feel good," touching anecdotes which draw tears, the magic oratory of a speaker which thrills his hearers, the clever showmanship of professional evangelists and singers who aim to 'produce an atmosphere' for worship (?) and which are designed to move the varied emotions of those in attendance, are so many examples of what is soulical and not spiritual at all. True worship, spiritual worship, is decorous, quiet, reverential, occupying the worshipper with God Himself; and the effect is to leave him not with a nervous headache (the inevitable reaction from the high tension produced by soulical activities) but with a peaceful heart and a rejoicing spirit.

“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things”  
(John 4:25).

Here is the Savior’s reward for His gracious patience in dealing with this woman. Slowly but surely the Word had done its work. At last this poor soul has been driven from every false refuge, and now she is ready for a revealed Savior. She is through with her prevarication and procrastinations. She had asked “*How?*”, and Christ had graciously answered her. She had inquired “*Whence?*”, and had received a kindly reply. She had said, “*Where?*”, and this difficulty had been disposed of too. And now her questions ceased. She speaks with greater confidence and assurance — ‘I know that Messiah cometh.’ This was tantamount to saying, “*I want Christ.*”

“Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).

For the seventh and last time (in this interview) the Lord addressed this soul whose salvation He sought and won. The moment the Samaritan woman expressed her desire for Christ, He answers,

“You have Him; He is now speaking to you.” Nothing more was needed. The Savior of sinners stood revealed. That was enough. All was settled now. “It was not a mount nor a temple; Samaria nor Jerusalem. She had found Jesus — a Savior — God. A detected sinner and a revealed Savior have met face to face, and all is settled, once and forever. She discovered the wonderful fact that the One who had asked her for a drink, knew all about her — could tell her all that ever she did, and yet He talked to her of salvation. What more did she want? Nothing” (C. H. M.).

“And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?” (John 4:27).

Once again we may discern the providential dealings of God, regulating and directing the slightest movements of His creatures. These disciples of Christ left the Savior seated on the well, while they went into the city to buy meat (verse 8). Had they remained

they would only have been in the way. The Lord desired to have this woman alone with Himself. His purpose in this had now been accomplished. Grace had achieved a glorious victory. Another brand had been plucked from the burning. The poor Samaritan adulteress had now been brought out of sin's darkness into God's marvelous light. The woman had plainly expressed her desire for the Christ to appear, and the Lord had revealed Himself to her. "And upon this came His disciples." Though they had not been permitted to hear what had been said between Christ and this woman, they returned in time to witness the happy finale. They needed to be taught a lesson. They must learn that the saving grace of God was not limited to Israel, that it was reaching out to sinners of the Gentiles, too. They "marvelled" as they beheld their Master talking to this despised Samaritan, but they held their peace. A Divine constraint arrested them. None of them dared to ask Him a question at that moment.

["The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city" \(John 4:28\).](#)

Here is the blessed climax. The patient work of the condescending Savior was now rewarded. The darkness was dissipated:

["The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" \(2 Corinthians 4:6\)](#)

now shone into the heart of this believing sinner. Four times had this woman referred directly to herself, and it is striking to note the contents and order of her respective statements.

**First**, she *acknowledged her thirst* — "Give me this water that (in order that) I thirst not" (verse 15).

**Second**, she *confessed her sin* — "I have no husband" (verse 17).

**Third**, she evidenced a *dawning intelligence* — "I perceive" (v. 19). **Fourth**, she avowed her faith — "I know that Messiah cometh" (v. 25).

**Finally**, she leaves her waterpot and goes forth to testify of Christ. "The woman then left her waterpot and went her way into the city." Notice carefully the word "then," which is parallel with the "upon this" of the previous verse. Both look back to what is recorded in verse 26 — "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am." It will be noted that the final word of this verse is in italics, which signifies

there is no corresponding word in the Greek. Omitting the word “he” the verse as it reads in the A.V. is unintelligible. We are satisfied that the correct reading would give “Jesus saith unto her, I am that speaketh unto thee.” It was the enunciation of the sacred “I am” title of Jehovah (see Exodus 3:14); it was the solemn affirmation that God was addressing her soul. It is a parallel utterance to John 8:58. The pronunciation of this ineffable Name was attended with awe-inspiring effects (cf. John 18:6). This explains, here, the silence of the disciples who marvelled when they found their Master talking with the woman, but asked Him no question. It accounts for that Divine constraint resting upon them. Moreover, it gives added force and significance to what we read of in verse 28 — “The woman then left her waterpot.” The weary Traveller by the well stood revealed as God manifest in flesh.

“The woman then left her waterpot.” Ah, was not that a lovely sequel! She “left her waterpot” because she had now found a well of “living water.” She had come to the well for literal water; that was what she had desired, and on what her mind was set. But now that she had obtained salvation, she thought no more of her “waterpot.” It is ever thus. Once there is a clear perception of Christ to the soul, once He is known and received as a personal Savior, there will be a turning away from that on which before the carnal mind was centered. Her mind was now stayed upon Christ, and she had no thought of well, water, or waterpot. The Messiah’s glory was now her end and aim. Henceforth, “for me to live *is Christ*” was her object and goal. She knew the Messiah now, not from hearsay, but from the personal revelation of Himself, and immediately she began to proclaim Him to others.

“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?” (John 4:28, 29).

How beautiful! Transformed from a convicted sinner into a devoted saint. The work had been thorough — nothing could be put to it, nor anything taken from it: because God had done it (Ecclesiastes 3:14). There was no placing this woman on probation. There was no telling her she must hold out faithful to the end if she would be saved — wretched perversion of men! No; she was saved; saved for all

eternity. Saved by grace through faith, apart from any works of her own. And now that she is saved, she wants to tell others of the Savior she had found. The love of Christ constrained her. She now had His nature within her, and therefore has she a heart of compassion of the lost.

“Christian reader, be this our work, henceforth. May our grand object be to invite sinners to come to Jesus. This woman began at once. No sooner had she found Christ for herself, than she forthwith entered upon the blessed work of leading others to His feet. Let us go and do likewise. Let us by word and deed — ‘by all means,’ as the apostle says — seek to gather as many as possible around the Person of the Son of God. Some of us have to judge ourselves for lukewarmness in this blessed work. We see souls rushing along the broad and well-trodden highway that leadeth to eternal perdition, and yet, how little are we moved by the sight! How slow are we to sound in their ears, that true, that proper Gospel note, ‘Come!’ O, for more zeal, more energy, more fervor! May the Lord grant us such a deep sense of the value of immortal souls, the preciousness of Christ, and the awful solemnity of eternity, as shall constrain us to more urgent and faithful dealing with the souls of men” (C. H. M.).

“And saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?... Come” was the word of invitation that this newly-born soul extended to those men. It was a word she had learned from Christ’s own lips (verse 16). It is the great word of the Gospel. It is the word which has resulted in peace to countless hearts. The last recorded words of this woman show her now as an active servant for Christ. It is remarkable to find that this final word of the woman was her seventh — the perfect number. Seven times, no more and no less, had Christ spoken to her — telling of the perfectness of His work in dealing with her. Six times she spoke to Him (the number of man in the flesh) before she was fully saved; and then to this is added the last recorded word when she went forth to tell others of the One who had saved her; making seven in all — this last one, the seventh, evidencing the *perfect work* which Christ had wrought in her!

Our next lesson will be devoted to John 4:31-42. Let the interested reader study the following questions: —

1. What is the central theme of verses 31-42?
2. What does verse 31 reveal to us about the disciples?
3. What did Christ mean when He said that doing the will of God provided Him with “meat to eat”? verses 32, 34.
4. What “work” of the Father did Christ “finish”? verse 34.
5. In applying what is said in verse 38 to ourselves what should be the true effect upon us?
6. What does “the Savior of the world” signify? verse 42.

# JOHN 4:31-42

## CHRIST IN SAMARIA

We begin with the usual Analysis of the passage which is to be before us. In it we see: —

1. The Disciples' Solicitude, verse 31.
2. The Disciples' Ignorance, verse 32.
3. The Disciples Instructed, verses 34-38.
4. The Samaritan Converts, verse 39.
5. The Samaritan's Request, verse 40.
6. The Samaritan Converts added unto, verse 41.
7. The Samaritan's Confession, verse 42.

Verses 31-38 form a parenthesis and tell us something of what transpired during the interval that followed the woman's leaving the well and the Samaritans coming to Christ because of her testimony to Him. They record a conversation which took place between the Lord and His disciples. The disciples, it will be remembered, had "gone away unto the city to buy meat," and had returned from their quest, to find their Master engaged in conversation with a woman of Samaria. They had marvelled at this, but none had interrogated Him on the matter. As they had heard the Savior pronounce the ineffable "I am" title (verse 26), a Divine restraint had fallen upon them. But now the interview between the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan harlot was over. Grace had won a glorious victory. A sinner had been brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and in consequence, had gone forth to tell others the good news which meant so much to her own heart.

Once more the Savior was left alone with His disciples. They had returned in time to hear His closing words with the woman, and had seen the summary effect they had on her. They had witnessed that which should have corrected and enlarged their cramped vision. They had been shown that whatever justification there might have been in the past for the Jews to have "no dealings with the Samaritans," this no longer held good. The Son of God had come to earth, "full of grace and truth," and the glad tidings concerning Him

must be proclaimed to all people. This was a hard lesson for these Jewish disciples, but with infinite patience the Lord bore with their spiritual dullness. In what follows we have a passage of great practical importance, which contains some weighty truths upon service.

“In the meanwhile His disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat” (John 4:31).

A little earlier in the day the disciples had left their Master sitting on the well, wearied from the long journey. Accordingly, they had procured some food, and had returned to Him with it. But He evidenced no desire for it. Instead of finding Christ weary and faint, they discovered Him to be full of renewed energy. He had received refreshment which they knew not of. This they could not understand, and so they begged Him to eat of that which they had brought Him. Their request was a kindly one. Their appeal to Him was well meant. But it was merely the amiability of the flesh. The ‘milk of human kindness’ must not be mistaken for the fruit of the Spirit. Sentimentality is not spirituality.

“But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of” (John 4:32).

This was scarcely a rebuke: it was more a word of instruction for their enlightenment. Their minds were upon material things; the Lord speaks of that which is spiritual. “Meat” was used as a figurative expression for that which satisfied. Christ’s heart had been fed. His spirit had been invigorated. What it was that had refreshed Him we learn from His next utterance. It was something the disciples “knew not of.” Not yet had they discovered that the one who gives out of the things of God is also a receiver. In dispensing spiritual blessing to others, one is blest himself. Peace and joy are a part of the reward which comes to him who does the will of God. The obedient servant has “meat to eat” that those not engaged in service know nothing about. These, and other principles of service, were what the Lord would now press upon His disciples.

“Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?” (John 4:33).

This confirmed what Christ had just said: disciples of His they might be, but as yet they were very ignorant about spiritual things. Their minds evidently dwelt more upon material things, than the things of God. They knew very little about the relation of Christ to the Father: their thoughts turned at once to the question as to whether or not any man had “brought him ought to eat.” Even good men are sometimes very ignorant; yea, the best of men are, until taught of God. “How dull and thick brained are the best, ‘till God rend the veil, and enlighten both the organ and the object” (John Trapp, 1650, A.D.). But let us not smile at the dullness of those disciples; instead, see in them an exhibition of our own spiritual stupidity, and need of being taught of God.

“Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34).

What did Christ mean? In what sense is doing the will of God “meat” to one who performs it? What is the Father’s “work?” And how was Christ “finishing” it? The answer to those questions must be sought in the setting of our verse, noting its connection with what has gone before and what follows. We must first ascertain the leading subject of the passage of which this verse forms a part.

As we proceed with our examination of the passage it will become more and more evident that its leading subject is service. The Lord was giving needed instruction to His disciples, and preparing them for their future work. He sets before them a concise yet remarkably complete outline of the fundamental principles which underlie all acceptable service for God. The all-important and basic principle is that of absolute obedience to the will of God. The servant must do the will of his master. This the perfect Servant Himself exemplified. Note how He refers to God. He does not say here, “My meat is to do the will of the Father,” but “the will of *Him that sent me.*” That shows it is service which is in view.

Now what was “the will” of the One who had sent Christ into the world? Was it not to deliver certain captives from the hands of the Devil and bring them from death unto life? If there is any doubt at all on the point John 6:38 and 39 at once removes it — “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. 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.” This at once helps us to define *the Father’s* “work” — “and finish his work, which must not be confounded with the work that was peculiarly the Son’s: though closely related, they were quite distinct. The “will” of the Father was that all those He had “given” to the Son should be saved; His “work” had been in appointing them unto salvation.

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Appointment unto salvation (see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13) is peculiarly the work of the Father; the actual saving of those appointed is the work of the Son, and in the saving of God’s elect the Son finishes the “work” of the Father. An individual example of this had just been furnished in the case of the Samaritan woman, and others were about to follow in the “many” who should believe on Him because of her testimony (verse 39), and the “many more” who would believe because of His own word (verse 41).

How all this casts its own clear light on John 5:4 of this fourth chapter, and explains to us the force of the “must” here The Lord had not journeyed to Samaria to gratify His own desire, for “he pleased not himself.” In infinite grace the Son of God had condescended to lay aside (temporarily) His glory and stooped to the place of a Servant; and in service, as in everything else, He is our great Exemplar. He shows us how to serve, and the first great principle which comes out here is that joy of heart, satisfaction of soul, sustenance of spirit — “meat” — is to be found in doing the will, performing the pleasure, of the One who sends forth. Here, then, the perfect Servant tells us what true service is — the simple and faithful performance of that which has been marked out for us by God. Our “meat” — the sustenance of the laborers heart, the joy of his soul — is not to be sought in results (the “increase”) but in doing the will of Him that sent us forth. That was Christ’s meat, and it must be ours, too. This was the first lesson, the Lord here teaches His disciples about Service. And it is the first thing which each of us who are His servants now, need to take to heart.

“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” (John 4:35).

It is very evident that it is the subject of Service which is still before us, and the principle enunciated in this verse is easily perceived. However, let us first endeavor to arrive at the local force of these words, and their particular significance to the disciples, before we reduce them to a principle of application to ourselves.

“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 is no need to conclude that the disciples had been discussing among themselves the condition of the fields through which they had walked on their way to the city to buy meat; though they may have done so. Rather does it seem to us that the Lord continued to instruct His disciples in figurative language. There seems no doubt that the Savior had in mind the spiritual state of the Samaritans and the estimate formed of them by His disciples. Possibly the Samaritans who had listened to the striking testimony of the woman now saved were on their way toward the well, though yet some considerable distance away, and pointing to them the Savior said to the disciples, “Lift up your eyes” and behold their state.

“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” This was plainly a rebuke. The disciples regarded Samaria as a most unlikely field to work in; at best much sowing would be required, and then a long wait, before any ripened grain could be expected. They never dreamed of telling them that the Messiah was just outside their gates! Must they not have hung their heads in shame when they discovered how much more faithful and zealous had been this woman than they? Here, then, is a further reason why Christ “must needs go through Samaria” — to teach His disciples a much needed *missionary* lesson.

What, now, is the application to us of the principle contained in this verse? Surely it is this: we must not judge by appearances. Ofttimes we regard certain ones as hopeless cases, and are tempted to think it would be useless to speak to *them* about Christ. Yet we never know what seeds of Truth may have been lodged in their hearts by the labors of other sowers. We never know what influences may be

working: oftentimes those who seem to us the most unlikely cases, when put to the test are the most ready to hear of the Savior. We cannot tell how many months there are to harvest!

“And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:36).

If the previous verse contained a rebuke, here was a word to encourage. “He that reapeth receiveth wages” seems to mean, This is a work in which it is indeed a privilege to be engaged, for the laborer receives a glorious reward, inasmuch as he “gathereth fruit unto life eternal.” The reward is an eternal one, for not only do those saved through the labors of the reaper receive eternal life, but because of this the joy of both will be eternal too. “That both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.” The sower may have labored hard toward the salvation of souls, and yet never be permitted to witness in this life the success which God gave to his efforts. The reaper, however, does witness the ingathering; nevertheless, both sower and reaper shall rejoice together in the everlasting salvation of those garnered through their joint efforts.

“And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth” (John 4:37).

There is a timely warning here. To “reap” is not everything, blessed as the experience is: to “sow” is equally important. The bountiful crop garnered at Sychar was, under God, the result of the labors of earlier sowers. These Samaritans were already informed about the appearing of the Messiah, and for this knowledge they were indebted to the faithful ministry of earlier servants of God. That one sows and another reaps had been exemplified in the case of the converted adulteress. Christ had met the need which the testimony of the prophets had awakened within her.

How gracious of the Lord to recognize and own the labors of those earlier sowers! Apparently their work had counted for little. They had sown the seed, yet seemingly the ground on which it had fallen was very unpromising. But now, under the beneficent influence of the Sun of righteousness came the harvest, and the Lord is not slack to remind His disciples of their indebtedness to the labors of those

who had gone before. Doubtless, Philip would recall these words of Christ in a coming day (see Acts 8). And what comfort is there here for the sower today! His labors may seem to go for nothing, but if he is diligent in sowing the proper “seed,” let him know that sooner or later all faithful service is rewarded. He may not “reap,” but “another” will —

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, 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).

“I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors” (John 4:38).

There is no doubt a historical reference here which points us back to what is recorded in Matthew 10, from which we learn that the Lord had sent forth the twelve apostles to “preach,” and to “heal the sick” (verses 7, 8.). This was in Judea, and the success of their labors is indicated in John 4:1, 2 — they had made and baptized many disciples. One can imagine the elation of the disciples over their success, and it was to repress their vanity that Christ here says to them, “I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.” He reminds them that they had prospered because others had labored before them. It was a word encouraging to the sower, sobering to the reaper. We may observe, in passing, that when the Lord sends us forth to “reap,” He directs us to fields which have already been sown. It should also be noted that the toil of the sower is more arduous than that of the reaper: when Christ says, “Other men *labored*, and ye (the reapers) are entered into their (the sowers’) labors” He used a word which signified “to toil to the point of exhaustion,” indeed it is the same word which is used of the Savior at the beginning of this chapter, when we read, “Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey.” Luther was wont to say, “The ministry is not an idle man’s occupation.” Alas that so often it degenerates into such.

Sowing and reaping are two distinct departments of Gospel ministry, and spiritual discernment (wisdom from God) is requisite to see which is the more needed in a given place.

“To have commenced sowing at Sychar would have indicated a want of discernment as to the condition of souls in that city. To have concluded from their success at Sychar, that all Samaria was ready to receive the Lord, would have been manifestly erroneous, as the treatment He met with in one of the villages of Samaria at a later period in His life clearly demonstrates. This, surely, can speak to us, where sowing and reaping may go on almost side by side. The work in one place is no criterion of what that in another place should be; nor does it follow, that the laborer, highly blessed in one locality, has only to move to another, to find that field also quite ready for his reaping-hook” (C. E. Stuart).

“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” (John 4:39).

At first glance it looks as though this verse introduces a change of subject, yet really it is not so. This verse, as also the two following, enunciates and illustrates other principles of service. In the first place, we are shown how that God is pleased to use feeble messengers to accomplish mighty ends. Frequently He employs weak instruments to make manifest His own mighty power. In this, as in everything else, the Lord’s thoughts and ways are very different from ours. He employed a shepherd lad to vanquish the mighty Goliath. He endowed a Hebrew slave with more wisdom than all the magicians of Babylon possessed. He made the words of Naaman’s servants to have greater effect upon their august master than did those of the renowned Elisha. In making selection for the mother of the Savior, He chose not a princess, but a peasant woman. In appointing the heralds of the Cross, fishermen were the ones called. And so a mighty work of grace was started there in Sychar by a converted harlot. “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

“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.”

The full force of this can only be appreciated as we go back to what is told us in verses 28 and 29. She did not say, ‘Of what use can I be for Christ? — I who have lost character with men, and have sunken into the lowest depths of degradation!’ No; she did not stop to reason, but with a conscience that had been searched in the presence of the Light and its burden of guilt removed, with a heart full of wonderment and gratitude to the One who had saved her, she immediately went forth to serve and glorify Him. She told what she knew; she testified of what she had found, but in connection with a Person. It was of Him she spoke; it was to Him she pointed. “He told me,” she declared, thus directing others to that One who had dealt so blessedly with her. But she did not stop there. She did not rest satisfied with simply telling her fellow-townsmen of what she had heard, nor Whom she had met. She desired others to meet with Him for themselves. “Come” she said; Come to Him for yourselves. And God honored those simple and earnest words: “Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for (because of) the saying of the woman.” Thus are we shown the great *aim* in service, namely, to bring souls into the presence of Christ Himself.

“So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them; and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his Word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:40-42, A. R. V.).

We have quoted from the A. B. V. because we believe it is the more correct here. The A. V. makes these Samaritans say, “For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” The majority of the Greek MSS. do not contain the words “the Christ” in verse 42. These Samaritans had learned from the lips of the woman *who* He was, “the Christ;” now they had discovered for themselves *what* He was — the One who met their deepest need, “The Savior.”

The above scripture places Samaria in striking contrast from the unbelief and rejection of the Judeans and those dwelling in Jerusalem, where so many of His mighty works had been done, and where it might be expected multitudes would have received Him.

Here in Samaria was a people who seemed most unpromising; no record is given of Christ performing a single miracle there; and yet many of these despised Samaritans received Him. And is it not much the same today? Those whom we would think were most disposed to be interested in the things of God are usually the most indifferent; while those whom we are apt to regard as outside, if not beyond, the reach of God's grace, are the very ones that are brought to recognize their deep need, and become, ultimately, the most devoted among the followers of the Lamb.

Let us now seek to gather up into a terse summary the leading lessons of the verses which have been before us. The whole passage has to do with service, and the fundamental principles of service are here enunciated and illustrated.

**First**, we learn the *essential requirement* of service, as illustrated in the example of the Samaritan woman — a personal acquaintance with the Savior, and a heart overflowing for Him.

**Second**, we are taught the spirit in which all service should be carried on — the faithful performance of the task allotted us; finding our satisfaction not in results, but in the knowledge that the will of God has been done by us.

**Third**, we are shown the *urgency* of service — the fields already white unto harvest.

**Fourth**, we have *encouragement* for service — the fact that we are gathering “fruit unto life eternal.”

**Fifth**, we learn about the *interdependence* of the servants — “one soweth and another reapeth:” there is mutual dependence one on the other: a holy partnership between those who work in the different departments of spiritual agriculture.

**Sixth**, we have a *warning* for servants: they who are used to doing the reaping must not be puffed up by their success, but must remember that they are entering into the labors of those who have gone before.

**Finally**; we are taught here the aim ever to be kept in view, and that is to bring souls into the presence of Christ, that they may become independent of us, having learned to draw directly from Him.

We would call attention to the following points brought out in these verses.

**First**, the worldwide missionary need signified in the Lord's words in verse 35.

**Second**, to the distinctive characteristic of this Age as seen in the absence of any public miracles. There is no hint of Christ performing any miracles here in Samaria: nor is He doing so publicly in the world today.

**Third**, to the means employed as indicated in verses 39 and 41, where we are told that it was the woman's testimony, and the Word which caused many of the Samaritans to "believe." Thus it is throughout this Age. It is the personal testimony of believers and the preaching of the Word, which are the Divinely appointed means for the propagation of Christianity.

**Fourth**, we may note the striking prominence of the Gentiles in this typical picture: "Many of the Samaritans... believed on Him." While there is a remnant of Israel "according to the election of grace" (typified in the few disciples who were with Christ), nevertheless, it is the Gentile element which predominates in the saved of this Age.

**Fifth**, mark that Christ is owned here not as "The Son of man," nor as "The Son of David," but as "The Savior of the world." This title does not mean that Christ is the Savior of the human race, but is a general term, used in contradistinction from Israel, including all believing Gentiles scattered throughout the earth.

Thus, once more, we discover that with marvelous skill the Holy Spirit has caused this historical narrative which traces the actions of the Savior in Samaria, and which records the instructions He there gave to His disciples, to embody a perfect outline which sets forth the leading features of this present Era of Grace, during which God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name. This should

cause us to search more diligently for the hidden beauties and harmonies of Scripture.

Below are the questions for the next lesson: —

1. How does verse 43 bring out the perfections of Christ?
2. How does “the Galileans received Him” (verse 45) confirm, “no honor in His own country” (Galilee) of verse 44?
3. Why are we told Christ was in Cana when He healed the nobleman’s son? verse 46.
4. Why are we told the nobleman belonged to Capernaum? verse 46.
5. In what way does verse 48 apply to us today?
6. What does the word “yesterday” in verse 52 tell us about the nobleman?

# JOHN 4:43-54

## CHRIST IN GALILEE

What has been before us from verse 4 to the end of verse 42 in this chapter is in the nature of a parenthesis, inasmuch as these verses record what occurred in Samaria, which was outside the sphere of Christ's regular ministry in Judea and Galilee. Here in the last twelve verses of the chapter we are brought onto familiar ground again. It would seem then, that we may expect to find a continuation of what was before us in the first three chapters of John's Gospel, namely, historical events and practical teaching in both of which the Divine and moral glories of the Lord Jesus are displayed, and beneath the narrative of which we may discern hidden yet definitely defined typical and prophetic pictures.

We saw in our earlier studies that two things are made very prominent in the opening chapters of this Gospel. First, the failure of Judaism, the deplorable condition of Israel. Some solemn portrayals of this have already been before us. In the second place, we have seen the Holy Spirit drawing our attention away from Israel to Christ; and then at the beginning of chapter four a third principle has been illustrated, namely, a turning from Judaism to the Gentiles. Furthermore, we have observed that not only do we have depicted in these opening sections of our Gospel the sad spiritual state of Israel at the time our Lord was here upon earth, but the narrative also furnishes us with a series of striking foreshadowings of the future. Such is the case in the concluding section of John 4.

Here, once more, we are reminded of the pitiable condition of Judaism during the days of Christ's public ministry. This is brought out in a number of particulars, which will become more evident as we study them in detail. First, we have the express testimony of the Lord Himself that He had no honor "in his own country." This was in vivid contrast from His experiences in Samaria. Second, while we are told that "the Galileans received him," it was not because they recognized the glory of His person, or the authority and life-giving value of His words, but because they had been impressed by what they had seen Him do at Jerusalem. Third, there is the declaration

made by Christ to the nobleman — intended, no doubt, for the Galileans also”except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” All of this serves to emphasize the condition of the Jews — their inability to recognize the Lord Jesus the Christ of God, and their failure to set to their seal that what He spake was the truth.

It is the practical lessons taught by this passage which are to occupy our attention in the body of this chapter. Before pondering these we submit an Analysis of this closing section of John 4: —

1. Christ goes into Galilee, verse 43.
2. Christ’s tragic plaint, verse 44.
3. Christ received by the Galileans, verse 45.
4. The nobleman’s request of Christ, verses 46, 47.
5. Christ’s reply, verses 48-50.
6. The nobleman’s journey home, verses 50-53.
7. This miracle Christ’s second in Galilee, verse 54.

“Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee” (John 4:43).

Different indeed are God’s ways from ours. During those days spent in Samaria many had believed on Christ to the saving of their souls. And now the Savior leaves that happy scene and departed into a country where He had received no honor. How evident it is that He pleased not Himself! He had come here to do the will of the Father, and now we see Him following the path marked out for Him. Surely there is an important lesson here for every servant of God today: no matter how successful and popular we may be in a place, we must move on when God has work for us elsewhere. The will of the One who has commissioned us must determine all our actions. Failure must not make us lag behind, nor success urge us to run before. Neither must failure make us fretful and feverish to seek another field, nor success cause us to remain stationary when God bids us move on. The one, perhaps, is as great a temptation as the other; but if we are following on to know the Lord, then shall we know when to remain and when to depart.

“Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee.” This resumes and completes what is said in verses 3 and 4. The Lord, accompanied by His disciples, left Judea because of the

jealousy and enmity of the Pharisees. He “departed again into Galilee” (verse 3). But before He goes there, “he must needs go through Samaria” (verse 4). We have learned something of the meaning of that “must needs.” But the need had now been met, so the Lord Jesus departed from Samaria and arrives at Galilee. The religious leaders in Jerusalem regarded Galilee with contempt (see John 7:41, 52). It was there that “the poor of the flock” were to be found. The first three Gospels record at length the Galilean ministry of the Redeemer, but John’s gives only a brief notice of it in the passage now before us.

“For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country” (John 4:44).

The reference is to what is recorded in Luke 4. At Nazareth, “where he had been brought up,” He entered the synagogue and read from Isaiah 60, declaring “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Those who heard Him “wondered,” and said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” They were totally blind to His Divine glory. The Lord replied by saying,

“Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:23, 24).

Proof of this was furnished immediately after, for when Christ referred to God’s sovereign dealings of old in connection with Elijah and Elisha, we are told, “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (verses 28, 29). Thus was He dishonored and insulted by those among whom His preministerial life had been lived.

He was without honor in “his own country,” that is, Galilee; and yet we now find Him returning there. Why, then, should He return thither? The answer to this question is found in Matthew 4:

“Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed *into Galilee*; And leaving Nazareth, he came and

dwelt in Capernaum which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Naphtalim: *That it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Naphtalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, *Galilee of the Gentiles*; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (verses 12-16).

This furnishes us with another instance of the obedience of the perfect Servant. In the volume of the Book it was written of Him. Prophecy is not only an intimation of what will be, but a declaration of what shall be. Prophecy makes known the decrees of God. As, then, Christ had come here to do the will of God, and God’s will (revealed in the prophetic word) had declared that the people in Galilee who walked in darkness, should see a great light, etc. (Isaiah 9:1, 2) the Lord Jesus Christ goes there.

“For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.” How this reveals to us the heart of the Savior! He was no stoic, passing through these scenes, unmoved by what He encountered: He was not insensible to the treatment He met with, He “endured such contradiction of sinners against himself” (Hebrews 12:3). The indifference, the unbelief, the opposition of Israel, told upon Him, and caused His visage to be “marred more than any man” (Isaiah 52:14). Hear Him, as by the spirit of prophecy, He exclaims,

“I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward with my God” (Isaiah 49:4).

So here, when we hear Him testifying, “A prophet hath no honor in his own country,” we can almost catch the sob in His voice. For two days He had experienced the joys of harvest. His spirit had been refreshed. The “meat” which had been ministered to His soul consisted not only of the consciousness that He had done the will of the One who had sent Him, but also in the faith and gratitude of the woman who had believed on Him. This had been followed by the Samaritans beseeching Him to tarry with them, and the consequent believing of many of them because of His word. But such joyful harvesting was only for a very brief season. Two days only did He

abide in Samaria. Now, He turns once more to Galilee, and He goes with sad foreboding.

“For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.” His use of the word “prophet” here is very suggestive. It was the word that the woman had used when her perceptive faculties began to be illumined (verse 19). There, in Samaria, He *had been* honored. The Samaritans believed His bare word, for no miracles were performed before them. But now in Galilee He meets with a faith of a very inferior order. The Galileans received Him because they had seen “all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast” (verse 45). So, too, the nobleman’s house (verse 53) did not believe until a miracle had been performed before their eyes. Thus a solemn contrast is pointed. In Galilee He is not honored for His person’s and word’s sake; in Samaria He was. As prophet He was not honored in Galilee; as a miracle-worker He was “received.” This principle is frequently exemplified today. There is many a servant of God who is thought more highly of abroad than he is at home. It is a true saying that “familiarity breeds contempt.” Ofttimes a preacher is more respected and appreciated when visiting a distant field than he is by his own flock.

“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” (John 4:45).

How this brings out the fickleness and the shallowness of human nature. For upwards of twenty years the man Christ Jesus had lived in Galilee. Little or nothing is told us about those years which preceded His public work. But we know that He did all things well. His manner of life, His ways, His deportment, His every act, must have stood out in vivid contrast from all around Him. Had His fellow-townsmen possessed any spiritual discernment at all they must have seen at once that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Holy One of God. But they were blind to His glory. The perfect life He had lived quietly among them was not appreciated. As the Son of God incarnate He was unknown and unrecognized.

But now things were changed. The humble Carpenter had left them for a season. He had commenced His public ministry. He had been

to Jerusalem. There He had sternly corrected the Temple abuses. There He had performed such miracles that many believed on his name” (John 2:23). Many of the Galileans who were in attendance at the Feast had also witnessed His wonderful works, and they were duly impressed. On their return home they would doubtless tell others of what they had witnessed. And now that the Lord Jesus returns to Galilee, He is at once “received.” Now that His fame had spread abroad the people flocked around Him. Such is human nature. Let a man who lived in comparative obscurity leave his native place, become famous in some state or country, and then return to his home town, and it is astonishing how many will claim friendship, if not kinship, with him. Human nature is very fickle and very superficial, and the moral of all this is to warn us not to place confidence in any man, but to value all the more highly (because of the contrast) the faithfulness of Him who changes not.

“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” (John 4:46).

*Why* should we be told *where* the Lord was when He performed the miracle of healing the nobleman’s son? Why, after mentioning Cana, is it added, “Where he made the water wine”? And why tell us in the last verse of the chapter, “This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee?” Surely it is apparent at once that we are to place the two miracles that were wrought at Cana side by side. The Holy Spirit indicates there is some connection between them, something which they have in common. Following this hint, a close study of the record of these two miracles reveals the fact that there is a series of striking comparisons between them, apparently seven in number.

In the first place, both were *third day* scenes: in John 2:1 we read, “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee;” and in John 4:43 we are told, “Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee.”

**Second**, when Mary came to Christ and told Him they had no wine, He *rebuked* her (John 2:4), so when the nobleman asked Christ to come down and heal his sick child the Lord rebuked him (John 4:48).

**Third**, in each case we see the *obedient response* made by those whom the Lord commanded (John 2:7 and 4:50).

**Fourth**, in both miracles we see *the Word at work*: in each miracle the Lord did nothing but speak.

**Fifth**, in both narratives mention is made of the servant's knowledge (John 2:9 and 4:51).

**Sixth**, the sequel in each case was that they who witnessed the miracle believed: in the one we read, "And his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11); in the other we are told, "And himself believed, and his whole house" (John 4:53).

**Seventh**, there is a designed similarity in the way in which *each narrative concludes*: in John 2:11 we are told, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee," and in John 4:54,

["This is again the second miracle which Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee."](#)

Here is another example of the importance of comparing two incidents which are placed side by side in Scripture (sometimes for the purpose of comparison, at others in order to point a series of contrast); here we have an example of comparison between two miracles which, though separated in time and in the narrative, both occurred at the same place, and are the only miracles recorded in the New Testament as being wrought in Cana.

"And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum." The word "nobleman" signifies a royal officer: probably he belonged to Herod's court; that he was a man of station and means is evident from the fact that he had servants (verse 51). But neither rank nor riches exempt their possessor from the common sorrows of human kind. Naaman was a great man, but he was a leper (2 Kings 5:1). So here was a nobleman, yet his son lay at the point of death. The rich have their troubles as well as the poor. Dwellers in palaces are little better off than those who live in cottages. Let Christians beware of setting their hearts on worldly riches: as Bishop Ryle well says, "They are uncertain comforts, but certain cares." No doubt this nobleman had tried every remedy which

money could produce. But money is not almighty. Many invest it with an imaginary value that it is far from possessing. Money can not purchase happiness, nor can it ensure health. There is just as much sickness among the aristocracy as there is among the common artisans.

“When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him” (John 4:47).

This domestic trial was a blessing in disguise, for it caused the anxious father to seek out Christ, and this resulted in him believing, and ultimately his whole house believed. God uses many different agents in predisposing men to receive and believe His Word. No doubt these lines will be read by more than one who dates his first awakening to the time when some loved one lay at death’s door — it was then he was made to think seriously and saw the need for preparing to meet God. It is well when trouble leads a man to God, instead of away from God. Affliction is one of God’s medicines; then let us beware of murmuring in time of trouble.

“And besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death” (John 4:47).

This nobleman evidently had a measure of faith in the ability of the great Physician, otherwise he had not sought Him at all. But the measure of his faith was small. He had probably learned of the miracles which the Lord had performed at Jerusalem, and hearing that He was now in Galilee — only a few miles distant — he goes to Him. The weakness of his faith is indicated in the request that the Lord should “come down” with him to Capernaum. He believed that Christ could heal close by, but not far away; at short range, but not at a distance. How many there were who thus limited Him. Jairus comes to Christ and says,

“My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, *come and lay thy hands on her*, that she may be healed; and she shall live” (Mark 5:23).

The woman with the issue of blood said, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole” (Mark 5:28). So, too, Martha exclaimed,

“Lord, if thou hadst *been here*, my brother had not died”  
(John 11:21).

But let us not censure them, rather let us condemn our own unbelief. But different far from this “nobleman” was the faith of the centurion that sought the Lord on behalf of his sick servant, and who said,

“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed”  
(Matthew 8:8).

It seems to us this is the reason (or one reason, at least) why we are told here in John 4 that the nobleman came from Capernaum, so that we should link the two together and note the comparisons and contrasts between them. Both resided at Capernaum: both were Gentiles: both were men of position: both came to Christ on behalf of a sick member of his household. But in Matthew 8 the centurion simply spread his need before Christ and refrained from dictating to Him; whereas the nobleman bids the Savior “come down” to Capernaum. In Matthew 8 we find that the Lord offered to accompany the centurion — Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him” (verse 7). He does the very opposite here in John 4. In Matthew 8 the centurion declines the Lord’s offer and says, “Speak the word only;” where as the nobleman meets Christ’s rebuke by repeating his original request — “Sir, come down ere my child die” (verse 49). Thus we see again the value of observing the law of Comparison and Contrast.

“Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48).

This was a rebuke. Not only was the faith of this nobleman weak, but he so far forgot himself as to dictate to the Lord Jesus, and tell Him what to do. The force of Christ’s reply seems to be this: ‘You are demanding signs of Me before you will fully trust your boy’s case into My hands.’ This is a serious mistake which is made by many seeking souls. We must not be so wickedly presumptuous as to tell God how to act and what to do. We must state no terms to the Lord Most High. He must be left to work in His own way. “Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” How this brings out the omniscience of Christ! He knew this man’s heart. A measure of

faith he had, but he was afraid to fully commit himself. The Lord knew this, and so addressed Himself to the suppliant accordingly.

“Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” How searching this is! Is it not a word that many of us need? Is it not at this very point we most often fail? We ask God for a certain thing, and we have a measure of faith that it will be given us; but in the interval of waiting the bare word of God is not sufficient for us — we crave a “sign.” Or again; we are engaged in some service for the Lord, and we are not without faith that our labors will result in some fruitage for Him, but ere the fruit appears we become impatient, and we long for a “sign.” Is it not so? Is it true of you, dear reader, that “except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe?” Ah! have we not all of us cause to cry, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24)? Fellow-worker, God has declared that His Word *shall not* return unto Him void (Isaiah 55:11). Is not that sufficient? Why ask for “signs”? Fellow-Christian, God has declared that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us (1 John 5:15). Is not His promise enough? Why, then, crave for “signs”?

“The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die” (John 4:49).

While it is evident that the nobleman was still slow of heart to commit himself, unreservedly, into the hands of Christ; nevertheless, it is good to see the spirit in which he received the Lord’s rebuke. Though he was a nobleman he did not become angry when corrected; instead, he “suffered the word of exhortation,” and with commendable importunity continued to plead his suit.

“The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.” Bishop Ryle has a helpful word on this:

“There is here a salutary lesson for the young. Sickness and death come to the young as well as the old. But the young are slow to learn this lesson. Parents and children are apt to shut their eyes to plain facts, and act as if the young never die young. The gravestones in our cemeteries show how many there are who never reached to man’s estate at all. The first grave ever dug on earth was for a young man! The first one who ever died was not a father, but a son! He,

then, who is wise will never reckon confidently on long life. It is the part of wisdom to be prepared.”

We trust these words will come home to the hearts of Christian parents who read this chapter. In the action of this father who came to Christ on behalf of his child there is an example which you will do well to emulate. If you are not deeply concerned about the soul’s welfare of your children, who is likely to be? It is *your* bounden duty to teach them the Word of God; it is your holy privilege to bring them in prayer to God. Do not turn over to a Sunday School teacher what is incumbent upon you. Teach your little ones the Scriptures from their earliest infancy. Train them to memorize such verses as Psalm 9:17; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 6:23, etc., and God has promised to honor them that honor Him. Be not discouraged if you are unable to detect any response, but rest on the promise, “Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it again after many days.”

“The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.” How the response of Christ to this request brought out the perfections of Jehovah’s Servant! This “nobleman,” remember, occupied a high social position; most likely he was a member of Herod’s court. To any man governed by fleshly considerations and principles, this would have been a tempting opportunity to make a favorable impression in society; it offered a chance to gain a footing in high places, which a man of the world would have quickly seized. But the Lord Jesus never courted popularity, nor did He ever toady to people of influence and affluence. He ever refused to use the ways of the world. He “condescended to men of low estate,” and was the Friend not of princes and nobles, but of “publicans and sinners.” Well may each servant of God take this to heart.

“Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth” (John 4:50).

The Lord never turns away a soul that truly seeks Him. There may be much ignorance (as indeed there is in all of us), there may be much of the flesh mixed in with our appeals, but if the heart is really set on Him, He always responds. And not only so, invariably He does far more for us than we ask or think. It was so here. He not

only healed the son of this nobleman, but He did so immediately, by the word of His power.

“Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.” This nobleman was a Gentile, for there were no “nobles” among the Jews; and in harmony with each similar case, the Lord healed his son from a distance. There are three, possibly four, different cases recorded in the Gospels, where Christ healed a Gentile, and in each instance He healed from a distance. There was a reason for this. The Jews were in covenant relationship with God, and as such “nigh” to Him. But the Gentiles, being “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise” were “far off” (Ephesians 2:12, 13), and this fact was duly recognized by the Savior.

[“And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him” \(John 4:50\).](#)

Here once more, we are shown the Word (John 1:1, 14) at work. This comes out prominently in the miracles described in this Gospel. The Lord does not go down to Capernaum and take the sick boy by the hand. Instead, He speaks the word of power and he is healed instantly. The “words” He spake were “spirit and life” (John 6:63). And this imparting of life at a distance by means of the word has a message for us today. If Christ could heal this dying boy, who was at least ten miles away, by the word of His mouth, He can give eternal life today by His word even though He is away in heaven. Distance is no barrier to Him.

“And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. This is very blessed. It shows us the power of the spoken word not only on the boy that was healed, but on his father, too — “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The nobleman had heard the word of God from the lips of the Son of God, and real faith, saving faith, was now begotten within him. He raises no objections, asks no questions, makes no demurs; but with implicit confidence in which he had heard, he believed, and went his way. No “signs” were needed, no feelings required to impart assurance. “He believed, and went his way.” This is how salvation comes to the sinner. It is simply a matter of taking God at His word, and setting to our seal that He is true. The very fact that it is God’s word guarantees its truthfulness.

This, we believe, is the only instance recorded in the New Testament where a “nobleman” believed in Christ — “not many noble are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26).

“And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him” (John 4:51, 52).

The word “yesterday” brings out a striking point. Cana and Capernaum were only a comparatively short distance apart: the journey could be made in about four hours. It was only one hour after midday when the Savior pronounced the sick boy healed. Such implicit confidence had the nobleman in Christ’s word, he did not return home *that* day at all!

I can picture the father on his way back home, going along happy and rejoicing. If some one had enquired as to the occasion of his joy, he would have been told it was because his child, at the point of death, had been restored. Had the enquirer asked how the father knew his child was now well, his answer would have been, ‘Because I have the word of Christ for it—what more do I need!’ And, dear reader, we too, shall be full of peace and joy if we rest on the sure Word of God (Romans 15:13). The father’s enquiry of his servants was not because of unbelief, but because he delighted to hear a recountal of what God had wrought. As John Wesley remarked on this verse, “The more exactly the works of God are considered, the more faith is increased?”

“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” (John 4:53).

The nobleman’s faith here is not to be regarded as any different from what is attributed to him in verse 50: it is simply a repetition, brought in here in connection with his house believing, too. It is a very rare thing to find a believing wife and believing children where the father, the head of the house, is himself an unbeliever. What an example does this incident furnish us of the mysterious workings of

God! — a boy brought to the point of death that a whole house might have eternal life.

Let the reader study carefully the following questions in preparation for the next lesson: —

1. What is the meaning of “Bethesda,” and what is the significance of the “five porches”? verse 2.
2. Why are we told the impotent man had suffered thirty-eight years? verse 5.
3. Why did Christ ask the impotent man such a question as is recorded in verse 6?
4. What does the man’s answer denote? verse 7.
5. What important principle is illustrated in verse 11?
6. What moral perfection of Christ is seen in verse 13?

# JOHN 5:1-15

## CHRIST AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

We begin with the usual Analysis: —

1. Jesus in Jerusalem at the feast, verse 1.
2. The pool of Bethesda and the sick congregated about it, verses 2-4.
3. The impotent man and Christ's healing of him, verses 5-9.
4. The healed man and his critics, verses 10-12.
5. The man's ignorance, verse 13.
6. Christ's final word with him, verse 14.
7. The man confesses Jesus, verse 15.

The scene introduced to us in this passage is indeed a pathetic one. The background is the pool of Bethesda, around which lay a great multitude of impotent folk. The great Physician approaches this crowd of sufferers, who were not only sick but helpless. But there was no more stir among them than in the quiet waters of the pool. *He* was neither wanted nor recognized. Addressing one of the most helpless of the sufferers, the Lord asked him if he is desirous of being made whole. Instead of responding to the sympathetic Inquirer with a prompt request that He would have mercy upon him, the poor fellow thought only of the pool and of some man to help him into it. In sovereign grace the Savior spoke the life-giving word, and the man was immediately and perfectly healed. Yet even then he was still ignorant of the Divine glory of his Benefactor. The healing took place on the Sabbath day, and this evoked the criticism of the Jews; and when they learned that it was Jesus who had performed the miracle "they sought to slay him." All of this speaks loudly of the condition of Judaism, and tells of the rejection of the Christ of God.

*"After this there was a feast of the Jews" (John 5:1).*

"After this" or, as it should be. "After these things," is an expression which is characteristic of John's Gospel as "Then" is of Matthew, "Immediately" of Mark, and "It came to pass" of Luke. It occurs seven times in this Gospel (Luke 3:22; 5:1; 5:14; 6:1; 7:1, 11:11;

21:1) and nine times in the Apocalypse. “It gives one the thought of Jesus acting according to a plan and times marked out ‘in the volume of the Book’ (Psalm 40:7) and of which He renders an account in John 17” (M. Taylor).

“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem” (John 5:1).

There is nothing to indicate which of the Feasts this was. Some think it was the Passover, but this we believe is most unlikely, for when that feast is referred to in John it is expressly mentioned by name: see John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55. Others think it was the feast of Purim, but as that was a human invention and not of Divine institution we can hardly imagine the Lord Jesus going up to Jerusalem to observe it. Personally we think it much more likely that the view of almost all the older writers is the correct one, and that it was the feast of Pentecost that is here in view. Pentecost occurred fifty days after the Passover, and the feast mentioned in John 4:1 follows the Passover mentioned in John 2:13. Pentecost is one of the three great annual Feasts which the law required every male Israelite to observe in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16), and here we see the Lord Jesus honoring the Divine Law by going up to Jerusalem at the season of its celebration. Doubtless there was a typical reason why the name of this feast should not be given here, for that to which the feast of Pentecost pointed received no fulfillment in the days of our Lord’s early ministry — contrast Acts 2:1.

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches” (John 5:2).

We believe the reference here is to the sheep “gate” of Nehemiah 3:1. At first glance Nehemiah 3 does not seem to be very interesting reading, and yet there is much in it that is precious. It describes the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in the days when a remnant of Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity. Various portions in the work of reconstruction were allotted to different individuals and companies. These portions or sections were from gate to gate. Ten gates are mentioned in the chapter. The first is the sheep gate (verse 1) and the last is “The gate Miphkad” which means “judgment,” and speaks, perhaps, of the judgment-seat of Christ; and then the chapter

concludes by saying, “And between the going up of the comer unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.” Thus the circle is completed, and at the close we are brought back to the point from which we started — “The sheep gate.” This is the gate through which the sacrificial animals were brought to the temple — the “lamb” predominating, hence its name. The sheep gate, then, points us at once to Christ, and tells of His Cross.

Now in the light of what we have just said, how exceedingly significant and blessed to note that we are here told the pool which was called Bethesda, meaning mercy, was by the “sheep” (gate). It is only in Christ that the poor sinner can find mercy, and it is only through His sacrifice on the Cross that this mercy is now obtainable for us in Him. What an instance is this of the great importance of noting carefully every little word in Scripture! There is nothing trivial in the Word of God. The smallest detail has a meaning and value; every name, every geographical and topographical reference, a message. As a further example of this, notice the last words of the verse — “having five porches.” The number of the porches here is also significant. In Scripture the numerals are used with Divine design and precision. Five stands for *grace* or *favor*. When Joseph desired to show special favor to his brother Benjamin we read,

“And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin’s mess was five times so much as any of theirs” (Genesis 43:34);

and again we are told,

“To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment” (Genesis 45:22).

Five and its multiples are stamped on every part of the tabernacle. It was with five loaves the Lord Jesus fed the hungry multitude. The fifth clause in the Lord’s prayer is, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The fifth Commandment was the only one with a promise attached to it; and so we might go on. Thus we see the perfect propriety of *five* porches (colonnades) around the pool of *Mercy*, situated “by the *sheep* (gate)”!

“In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water” (John 5:3).

What a picture of the Jewish nation at that time! How accurately does the condition of that multitude of sufferers describe the spiritual state of Judaism as it then existed! God had dealt with their father in sovereign mercy and marvelous grace, but the Nation as such appreciated it not. A few here and there took the place of lost sinners, and were saved, but the “great multitude” remained in their wretchedness. Israel as a people were impotent. They had the Law, made their boast in it, but were unable to keep it. Not only were they impotent, but “blind” — blind to their own impotency, blind to their wretchedness, blind to their desperate need, and so blind to the Divine and moral glories of the One who now stood in their midst “they saw in him no beauty that they should desire him.” A third word describing their condition is added, “halt:” the term signifies one who is lame, crippled. Israel had the Law but they were unable to walk in the way of God’s commandments. A blind man is able to grope his way about: but a cripple cannot walk at all. Again; we are told this “great multitude” were “withered.” This, no doubt, refers to those whose hands were paralyzed (cf. Matthew 12:10; Luke 6:6), and as a description of Israel it tells us that they were totally incapacitated to work for God. What a pitiable picture! First, a general summing up of their state — “impotent.” Second, a detailed diagnosis under three descriptive terms “blind” (in their understandings and hearts), “halt” (crippled in their feet, so that they were unable to walk), “withered” (in their hands so that they were unable to work). Third, a word that speaks of their response to the prophetic word

“waiting”; waiting for the promised Messiah, and all the time ignorant of the fact that He was there in their midst! Who but the Spirit of God could have drawn so marvelously accurate a picture in such few and short lines!

We must not, however, limit this picture to Israel, for it is equally applicable and pertinent to sinners of the Gentiles too. Israel in the flesh was only a sample of fallen man as such. What we have here is a pointed and solemn delineation of human depravity, described in physical terms; its moral application is to the whole of Adam’s fallen

race. Let every reader see here a portrait of what he or she is by nature. The picture is not flattering we know. No; it is drawn by One who searcheth the innermost recesses of the human heart, and is presented here to humble us. The natural man is impotent — “without strength” (Romans 5:6). This sums up in a single word his condition before God: altogether helpless, unable to do a single thing for himself. Then follows an amplification of this impotency, given in three (the number of full manifestation) descriptive terms. First, he is blind. This explains the lethargic indifference of the great multitude today — sporting on the very brink of the Pit, because unable to see the frightful peril that menaces them; making merry as they hasten down the Broad Road, because incompetent to discern the eternal destruction which awaits them at the bottom of it. Yes, blind indeed is the natural man: “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they knew not at what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19).

“Halt”: lame, crippled, unable to walk. How inevitably this follows the other! How can one who is spiritually blind walk the Narrow Way that leadeth unto life? “Mine eye affecteth mine heart” (Lamentations 3:51), and out of the heart are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23); if then the eye be evil, the body also is full of darkness (Luke 11:34). Halt — lame — a cripple — if, then, such an one is ever to come to Christ he *must* indeed be “drawn” (John 6:44).

“Withered” — blind eyes, crippled feet, paralyzed hands: unable to see, unable to walk, unable to work. How striking is the order here! Consider them inversely: a man cannot perform good works unless he is walking with God; and he will not begin to walk with God until the eyes of his heart have been opened to see his need of Christ. This is the Divine order, and it never varies. First the eyes must be opened, and then an illumined understanding prepares us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called; and that, in turn, equips us for acceptable service for God. But so long as the eyes are “blind” the feet will be “halt” and the hands “withered.”

“Waiting for the moving of the water.” Surely this is not hard to interpret. This pool was the object in which the great multitude placed all their hopes. They were waiting for its waters to be “troubled” so that its curative property might heal them. But they

waited in vain. The one invalid who is singled out from the crowd had been there “a long time,” and little had it availed him. Is it not thus with the *ordinances* of the religious world? How many there are — “a great multitude” indeed — which place their faith in the waters of baptism, or in the ‘mass’ and ‘extreme unction’! And a *long* time all such will have to wait before the deep need of their *souls* will be met.

“For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the waters stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had” (John 5:4).

We return now to the Jewish application of our passage. The waters of this pool reflect the Sinaitic law, which was “given by the disposition of angels”; that law which promised “life” to him who did all that it enjoined. But whoever kept the law? Whoever obtained life by meeting its demands? None of Adam’s fallen race. The law was “weak through the flesh.” A perfect man could keep it, but a sinner could not. Why, then, was the law given? That the offense might abound; that sin might be shown to be exceeding sinful; that the sinner might discover his sinfulness. His very efforts to keep the law, and his repeated failures to do so, would but make manifest his utter helplessness. In like manner, when the angel troubled the water of Bethesda so that the first to step into it might be made whole, this only magnified the sufferings of those who lay around it. How could those who were “impotent” step in! Ah! they could not. Was, then, God mocking man in his misery? Nay, verily. He was but preparing the way for that which was “better” (Hebrews 11:40). And this is what is brought before us in what follows.

“And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years” (John 5:5).

How this serves to confirm our interpretation of the previous verse, and what an illustration it furnishes us again of the deep significance of every word of Scripture. Why should the Holy Spirit have been careful to tell us the exact length of time this particular sufferer had been afflicted? What is the meaning and message of this “thirty and eight years”? Are we left to guess at the answer? No, indeed. Scripture is its own interpreter if we will but take the trouble to

patiently and diligently search its pages and compare spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:13). Thirty-eight years was exactly the length of time that Israel spent in the wilderness after they came under law at Sinai (see Deuteronomy 2:14). There it was, in the Wilderness of Sin, that of old Israel manifested their “impotency” — blind, halt, withered — under law.

“When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had now been a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5:6).

Here is Light shining in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. The very shining of the Light only served to reveal how great was the darkness. There was a great multitude of sick ones lying around that disappointing pool, and here was the great Physician Himself abroad in the land. Bethesda thickly surrounded, and Christ Himself passing by unheeded! Truly the “darkness comprehended not.” And is it any different today? Here is human religion with all its cumbersome machinery and disappointing ordinances *waited on*, and the grace of God slighted. Go yonder to India with its myriad temples and sacred Ganges; visit Thibet, the land of praying-wheels; turn and consider the devotees of Mohammed and their holy pilgrimages; come nearer home, and look upon the millions of deluded Papists with their vigils and fasts, their beads and holy water; and then turn in to the religious performances in many of the Protestant churches, and see if there are any differences in the underlying principles which actuate them. They one and all fail, utterly fail, to meet the deep need of the soul. One and all they are unable to put away sin. And, yet, sad to say, they one and all supplant the Christ of God — *He* is not wanted; *He* passes by unnoticed.

Such is fallen human nature. The whole world lieth in the wicked one (1 John 5:19), and were it not for sovereign grace every member of Adam’s race would perish eternally. Grace is the sinner’s only hope. Desert he has none. Spirituality he has none. Strength he has none. If salvation is to come to him, it must be by grace, and grace is unmerited favor shown toward the hell-deserving. And just because grace is this, God exercises His sovereign prerogative in bestowing His favors on whom He pleases —

“For he saith to Moses, I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Romans 9:16).

And let none murmur against this and suppose that any one is wronged thereby. Men prate about God being unjust, but if justice, real justice, bare justice, be insisted on, hope is entirely cut off for all of us. Justice requires that each should receive his exact due; and what, dear reader, is your due, my due, but judgment! Eternal life is a gift, and if a gift it can neither be earned nor claimed. If salvation is God’s gift, who shall presume to tell Him the ones on whom He ought to bestow it? Was salvation provided for the angels that fell? If God has left them to reap the due reward of their iniquities, why should He be charged with injustice if He abandons to themselves those of mankind who love darkness rather than light? It is not that God *refuses* salvation to any who truly seek it. Not so; there is a Savior for every sinner who will repent and believe. But if out of the great multitude of the impenitent and unbelieving God determines to exercise His sovereign grace by singling out a few to be the objects of His irresistible power and distinguishing favors, who is wronged thereby? Has not God the right to dispense His charity as seemeth best to Himself (Matthew 20:15)? Certainly He has.

The sovereignty of God is strikingly illustrated in the passage now before us. There lay a “great multitude” of impotent folk: all were equally needy, all equally powerless to help themselves. And here was the great Physician, God Himself incarnate, infinite in power, with inexhaustible resources at His command. It had been just as easy for Him to have healed the entire company as to make a single individual whole. *But He did not.* For some reason not revealed to us, He passed by the “great multitude” of sufferers and singled out one man and healed him. There is nothing whatever in the narrative to indicate that this “certain man” was any different from the others. We are not told that he turned to the Savior and cried “Have mercy on me.” He was just as blind as were the others to the Divine glory of the One who stood before him. Even when asked “Wilt thou be made whole?” he evidenced no faith whatever; and after he had been healed “He wist not who it was” that had healed him. It is impossible to find any ground in the man himself as a reason for Christ singling him out for special favor. The only explanation is the

mere sovereign pleasure of Christ Himself. This is proven beyond the shadow of doubt by His own declaration immediately afterwards

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“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (verse 21).

This miracle of healing was a parable in action. It sets before us a vivid illustration of God’s work of grace in the spiritual realm. Just as the condition of that impotent multitude depicts the depravity of Adam’s fallen race, so Christ singling out this individual and healing him, portrays the sovereign grace of Him who singles out and saves His own elect. Every detail in the incident bears this out.

“When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case.” Note the individuality of this. We are not told that he saw them the “great multitude” — but *him*. The eyes of the Savior were fixed on that one who, out of all the crowd, had been given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world. Not only are we told that Christ “saw him,” but it is added, “and knew that he had been now a long time in that case.” Yes, He knew all about him; had known him from all eternity —

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep” (John 10:11).

And then we read, “And saith unto him.” It was not the man who spoke first, but Christ. The Lord always takes the initiative, and invites Himself. And it was thus with you, Christian reader, when sovereign grace sought you out. You, too, were lying amid the “great multitude of impotent folk,” for by nature you were a child of wrath, “even as others” (Ephesians 2:3). Yes, you were lying in all the abject misery of a fallen creature — blind, halt, withered — unable to do a thing for yourself. Such was your awful state when the Lord, in sovereign grace, drew near to you. O thank Him now that He did not pass you by, and leave you to the doom you so richly deserved. Praise Him with a loud voice for His distinguishing grace that singled *you* out to be an object of His sovereign mercy. But we must now consider the force of the Savior’s question here.

“He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5:6).

Does it seem strange that such a question should be put to that sufferer? Would not being made whole be the one thing desired above all others by a man who had suffered for thirty-eight years? Was not the very fact that he was lying there by the pool an indication of what he wished? Why, then, ask him “Wilt thou be made whole?” Ah! the question is not so meaningless as some might suppose. Not always are the wretched willing to be relieved. Invalids sometimes trade on the sympathy and indulgence of their friends. Others sink so low that they become despondent and give up all hope, and long for death to come and relieve them. But there is something much deeper here than this.

Did not the Savior ask the question to impress upon this man the utter helplessness of his condition! Man must be brought to recognize and realize his impotency. Whilever we console ourselves we will do better next time, that is a sure sign we have not come to the end of ourselves. The one who promises himself that he will amend his ways and turn over a new leaf has not learned that he is “without strength.” It is not till we discover we are helpless that we shall abandon our miserable efforts to weave a robe of righteousness for ourselves. It is not till we learn we are impotent that we shall look outside of ourselves to Another.

No doubt one reason why Christ selected so many incurable cases on which to show forth His power, was in order to have suitable objects to portray to us the irreparable ruin which sin has wrought and the utter helplessness of man’s natural estate. The Savior, then, was pressing upon the man the need of being made whole. But more: when the Savior said, “Wilt thou be made whole?” it was tantamount to asking, ‘Are you willing to put yourself, just as you are, into My hands? Are you ready for Me to do for you what you are unable to do for yourself? Are you willing to be my debtor?’

“The impotent man answered, 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” (John 5:7).

How sadly true to life. When the great Physician said, “Wilt thou be made whole?” the poor sufferer did not promptly answer, ‘Yea Lord; undertake for me.’ And not thus does the sinner act when first

brought face to face with Christ. The impotent man failed to realize that Christ could cure him by a word. He supposed he must get into the pool. There are several lines of thought suggested here, but it is needless to follow them out. The poor man had more faith in means than he had in the Lord. And, too, his eye was fixed on “man,” not God: he was looking to human kind for help. Again we would exclaim, How true to life! Moreover, he thought that he had to do something — “While I am coming.” How this uncovers the heart of the natural man! How pathetic are the closing words of this verse! What a heartless world we live in. Human nature is lull of selfishness. Christ is the only unfailing Friend of the friendless.

“Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:8).

If the Savior waited until there was in the sinner a due appreciation of His person, none would ever be saved. The sufferer had made no cry for mercy, and when Christ inquired if he were willing to be made whole there was no faith evidenced. But in sovereign grace the Son of God pronounced the life-giving word, yet it was a word that addressed the human responsibility of the subject. A careful analysis of the command of Christ reveals three things.

**First**, there must be implicit confidence in His word. “Rise” was the peremptory command. There must be a hearty recognition of His authority, and immediate response to His orders. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” is something more than a gracious invitation; it is a command (1 John 3:23).

**Second**, “Take up thy bed” — a cotton pallet, easily rolled up. There was to be no thought of failure, and no provision made for a relapse. How many there are who take a few feeble steps, and then return to their beds! ‘The last state of such is worse than the first. If there is faith in the person of Christ, if there is a submission to His authority, then the new life within will find an outlet without: and we shall no longer be a burden to others, but able to shoulder our own burdens.

**Third**, “And walk.” I like that word coming here. It is as though the Savior said, ‘You were unable to walk into the water: you could not walk in order to be cured, but now that you are made whole, “walk!”’ There are duties to be faced of which we have had no

previous experience, and we must proceed to discharge them in faith; and in that faith in which He bids us do them will be found the strength needed for their performance.

“And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath” (John 5:9).

How blessed! The cure was both instantaneous and complete. Christ does not put the believing sinner into a salvable state. He saves, saves us with a perfect and eternal salvation the moment we believe:

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

We need hardly say that we are here shown, once more, the Word at work. The Savior did nothing but speak, and the miracle was accomplished. It is thus the Son of God is revealed to us again and again in this fourth Gospel.

“The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed” (John 5:10).

How true to life again! The one who surrenders to his Lord must expect to encounter criticism. The one who regulates his life by the Word of God will be met by the opposition of man. And it is the *religious* world that will oppose most fiercely. Unless we subscribe to their creed and observe their rules of conduct, persecution and ostracism will be our lot. Unless we are prepared to be brought into bondage by the traditions of the elders we must be ready for their frowns. Christ was not ignorant of the current teaching about the Sabbath, and He knew full well what would be the consequences should this healed man carry his bed on the sabbath day. But he had come here to set His people free from the shackles which religious zealots had forged. Never did He toady to the public opinion in His day; nor should we. There are thousands of His people who need to be reminded of Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” If the child of God is regulated by the

Scriptures and knows that he is pleasing his Lord, it matters little or nothing what his fellowmen (or his fellow-Christians either) may think or say about him. Better far to displease them than to be entangled again in the yoke of bondage, and thus “*frustrate the grace of God*” (Galatians 2:21).

“He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:11).

This sets a fine example for us. How simply he met his critics. He did not enter into an argument about their perverted view of the Sabbath: he did not charge them with want of sympathy for those who were sufferers, though he might have done both. Instead, he hid behind Christ. He fell back upon the Word of God. Well for us when we have a “Thus saith the Lord” to meet our critics.

“Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was” (John 5:12, 13).

This illustrates the fact that there is much ignorance even in believers. We ought not to expect too much from babes in Christ. This man had been healed, and he had obeyed the command of his Benefactor; but not yet did he perceive His Divine glories. Intelligence concerning the person of Christ follows (and not precedes) an experimental acquaintance with the virtues of His work.

“For Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place” (John 5:13).

This brings out the moral Perfections of the Savior. It evidences the meekness of the Divine Servant: He ministered without ostentation. He never sought to be the popular idol of the hour, or the center of an admiring crowd. Instead of courting popularity, He shunned it. Instead of advertising Himself, He “received not honor from men.” This lovely excellency of Christ appears most conspicuously in Mark’s Gospel: see Mark 1:37, 38, 44; 7:17, 36; 8:26, etc.

“Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee” (John 4:14).

The Lord had withdrawn from the man. Christ had retired in order that he might be tested. New strength had been given him; opportunity was then afforded for him to use it. The restored sufferer did not falter. The One who had saved him was obeyed as Lord. The Jewish critics had not intimidated him. That a work of grace had been wrought in his soul as well as in his body is evidenced by the fact that he had gone to the House of Prayer and Praise. And there, we are told, the Lord Jesus found him. This is most blessed. Christ was not to be met with in the throng, but He was to be found in the temple!

Having dealt in “grace” with the poor helpless sufferer Christ now applied the “truth.” “Sin no more” is a word for his conscience. Grace does not ignore the requirements of God’s holiness: “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1 Corinthians 15:34) is still the standard set before us. “Lest a worse thing come unto thee” reminds us that the believer is still subject to the government of God. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). is addressed to believers, not unbelievers. If we sin we shall suffer chastisement. Bishop Ryle has pointed out that there is here an important message for those who have been raised from a bed of sickness. “Sin no more”: renewed health ought to send us back into the world with a greater hatred of sin, a more thorough watchfulness over our ways, a greater determination to live for God’s glory.

“The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, that had made him whole” (John 5:15).

This gives beautiful completeness to the whole incident. Here we see him who had been healed confessing with his lips the One who had saved him. It would seem that as soon as the Lord Jesus had revealed Himself to this newly-born soul, that he had sought out the very ones who had previously interrogated and criticized him, and told them it was Jesus who had made him whole.

Study the following questions on the next lesson, verses 16-31:

1. What is the force of Christ’s answer in verse 17?
2. What is the meaning of Christ’s words in verse 19?
3. How does verse 20 bring out the Deity of Christ?

4. What does verse 23 go to prove about Christ?
5. How does verse 24 establish the eternal security of the believer?
6. Why should the “Son of man” be the Judge? verse 28.
7. Does verse 30 speak of Christ’s humanity or Deity?

# JOHN 5:16-30

## THE DEITY OF CHRIST: SEVENFOLD PROOF

We present our customary Analysis of the passage which is to be before us. It sets forth the absolute equality of the Son with the Father: —

1. In Service, verses 16-18.
2. In Will, verse 19.
3. In Intelligence, verse 20.
4. In Sovereign Rights, verse 21.
5. In Divine Honors, verses 22-23.
6. In Imparting Life, verses 24-26.
7. In Judicial Power and Authority, verses 27-30.

There is an intimate connection between the passage before us and the first fifteen verses of the chapter: the former provides the occasion for the discourse which follows. The chapter naturally divides itself into two parts: in the former we have recorded the sovereign grace and power of the Lord Jesus in healing the impotent man on the Sabbath day, and the criticism and opposition of the Jews; in the latter we have the Lord's vindication of Himself. The second half of John 5 is one of the profoundest passages in this fourth Gospel. It sets forth the Divine glories of the incarnate Son of God. It gives us the Lord's own teaching concerning His Divine Sonship. It also divides into two parts: in the former is contained the Lord's sevenfold declaration of His Deity; in the latter, beginning at verse 41, He cites the different witnesses to His Deity. We shall confine ourselves now to the former section. May the Spirit of Truth whose blessed work it is to "glorify" the One who is now absent from these scenes illumine our understandings and enable us to rightly divide this passage of God's inspired Word.

The miracle of the healing of the impotent man, which engaged our attention in the last chapter, has several outstanding and peculiar features in it. The abject misery and utter helplessness of the sufferer, the sovereign action of the Great Physician in singling him out from the multitude which lay around the Pool of Bethesda, the

total absence of any indication of him making any appeal to Christ or exercising any faith in Him previous to his healing, the startling suddenness and spontaneity of the miracle, the Lord's command that he should "take up his bed" on the Sabbath day, are all so many items that at once arrest the attention. The turning of the healed man's steps toward the Temple, evidenced that a work of grace had been wrought in his soul as well as in his body. The grace of the Lord is seeking him out in the Temple and the faithful words there addressed to his conscience, give beautiful completeness to the whole scene. All of this but serves to emphasize the enormity of what follows:

As soon as the healed man had learned Who it was that had made him whole, he went and "told the Jews that it was Jesus" (verse 15). What, then, was their response? Did they immediately seek this Blessed One who must be none other than their long-promised Messiah? Did they, like the prophetess Anna, give thanks unto the Lord, and speak "of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38)? Alas, it was far otherwise. Instead of being filled with praise, they were full of hatred. Instead of worshipping the Sent One of God, they persecuted Him. Instead of coming to Him that they might have life, they sought to put Him to death. Terrible climax was this to all that had gone before. In chapter one we see "the Jews" ignorant as to the identity of the Lord's forerunner (John 1:19), and blind to the Divine Presence in their midst (John 1:26). In chapter two we see "the Jews" demanding a sign from Him who had vindicated the honor of His Father's House (John 2:18). In chapter three we are shown "a ruler of the Jews" dead in trespasses and sins, needing to be born again (John 3:7). Next we see "the Jews" quibbling or quarreling with John's disciples about purifying (John 3:25). In chapter four we learn of their callous indifference toward the Gentile neighbors — "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). Then, in the beginning of chapter five, we read of "a feast of the Jews," but its hollow mockery is exposed in the scene described immediately afterwards — a "feast," and then "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered? Now the terrible climax is reached when we are told, "And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day" (John 5:16).

Beyond this they could not go, save, when God's time had come, for the carrying out of their diabolical desires.

“And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day” (John 5:16).

Unspeakably solemn is this, for it makes manifest, in all its hideousness, that carnal mind which is enmity against God. Here was a man who had been afflicted for thirty and eight years. For a long time he had lain helplessly by the pool of Bethesda, unable to step into it. Now, of a sudden, he had risen up in response to the quickening word of the Son of God. Not only so, he carried his bed, and walked. The cure was patent. That a wondrous miracle had been wrought could not be gainsaid. Unable to refute it, the Jews now vented their malice by persecuting the Divine Healer, and seeking to put Him to death. They sought to kill Him because He had healed on the Sabbath day. What a situation! They dared to put themselves against the Lord of the Sabbath. The One who had performed the miracle of healing was none other than the Son of God. In criticising Him, they were murmuring against God Himself. Therefore, we say we have here an out and out exposure of that carnal mind which is enmity against God: that carnal mind which, my reader, is by nature, in each of us. How this reveals the awful depravity of the fallen creature. How it demonstrates our deep need of a Savior! How it makes manifest that wondrous grace of God which provided a Savior for such incorrigible rebels.

“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17).

This was not the only occasion when the Lord Jesus was criticised for healing the sick on the Sabbath day, and it is most instructive to observe (as others before us have pointed out) the various replies He made to His opponents as these are recorded by the different Evangelists. Each of them narrates the particular incident (and the Lord's words in connection with it) that most appropriately accorded with the distinctive design of His Gospel. In Matthew 12:2, 3 we find that Christ appealed to the example of David and the teaching of the Law, which was well suited for record in this Gospel. In Mark 2:24, 27 we read that He said, “The sabbath was made for man,” that

is, it was designed to serve man's best interests — this in the Gospel which treats most fully of service. In Luke 13:15 we find the Lord Jesus asking, "Doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?": here, in the Gospel of Christ's humanity, we find Him appealing to human sympathies. But in John 5 Christ takes altogether higher ground and makes answer suited to His Divine glory.

"But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Here is the first of the seven proofs which Christ now gives of His absolute Deity. Instead of pointing to the example of David or appealing to human sympathies, Christ identifies Himself directly with "the Father." In saying "My Father worketh hitherto and I work" He affirms His absolute equality with the Father. It would be nothing short of blasphemy for a mere creature — no matter how exalted his rank or how great his antiquity — to couple himself with the Father thus. When He speaks of "My Father... and I" there is no misunderstanding the claim that He made. But let us ponder first the pertinency of this affirmation.

"My Father worketh hitherto." It is true that on the seventh day God rested from all His creative works. As we read in Genesis 2:3,

"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made."

That seventh day of rest was not needed by Him to recuperate from the toil of the six days' labor, for

"the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isaiah 40:28).

No; but it is otherwise with the creature. Work tires us, and rest is a physical and moral necessity, and woe be to the man or woman who ignores the merciful provision "made for man." If we refuse to rest throughout one day each week, God will compel us to spend at least the equivalent of it upon our backs on a bed of sickness — "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." God, at the beginning, set before His creatures a Divine example, and pronounced the Day of Rest a "blessed" one, and blessing has always attended those who have

observed and preserved its rest. Contrariwise, a curse has descended, and still descends, on those who rest not one day in seven. God not only blessed the seventh day, but He “hallowed” it and the word “hallow” means to set apart for sacred use.

While it is true that God rested on that first seventh day from all His creative work, He has never rested from His governmental work, His providential work, supplying the needs of His creatures. The sun rises and sets, the tides ebb and flow, the rain falls, the wind blows, the grass grows on the weekly Rest Day as well as on any other. What we may term works of necessity and works of mercy — that is upholding and sustaining the whole realm of creation and the daily recurring needs of His creatures — God never rests from.

Now says Christ, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” All through the centuries has the Father been working. Nor had His working been restricted to the material realm. In illuminating the understandings of men, in convicting their consciences, in moving their wills, had He also “worked hitherto.” If, then, it was meet that God the Father worked with unremitting patience and mercy, if the Father ministered to the wants of His needy creatures on the Sabbath day, then by parity of reason it must also be right for God the Son, the Lord of the Sabbath, to engage in works of necessity and mercy on the weekly Rest Day. Thus the Lord Jesus unequivocally claims absolute equality with the Father in service.

“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” (John 5:18).

There was no mistaking the force of Christ’s declaration. By saying “My Father... and I” He had done what, without the greatest impropriety, was impossible to any mere creature. He had done what Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, never dreamed of doing. He had placed Himself on the same level with the Father. His traducers were quick to recognize that He had “made himself equal with God,” and they were right. No other inference could fairly be drawn from His words. And mark it attentively, the Lord Jesus did not charge them with wresting His language and misrepresenting His meaning. He did not protest against their construction of His words. Instead of

that He continued to press upon them His Divine claims, stating the truth with regard to His unique personality and presenting the evidence on which His claim rested. And thus did He vindicate Himself not only from the charge of Sabbath-violation in having healed by His Divine word a poor helpless sufferer on that day, but also of blasphemy, in making an assertion in which by obvious implication, was a claim to equality with God.

Christ's claim to absolute equality with God only fanned the horrid flame of the enmity in those Jewish zealots — they “sought the more to kill him.” A similar scene is presented to us at the close of John 8. Immediately after being told that the Lord Jesus said “Before Abraham was I am” (another formal avowal of His absolute Deity) we read, “Then took they up stones to cast at him” (verses 58, 59). So again in the tenth chapter we find that as soon as He had declared “I and Father are one” *Then* the Jews took up stones again to stone him” (verses 30, 31). Thus did the carnal mind of man continue to display its inveterate enmity against *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” (John 5:19).

This is a verse which has been a sore puzzle to many of the commentators, and one used frequently by the enemies of Christ who deny His Deity. Even some of those who have been regarded as the champions of orthodoxy have faltered badly. To them the words “The Son can do nothing of himself” seem to point to a blemish in His person. They affirm a limitation, and when misunderstood appear to call for a half apology. The only solution which seems to have occurred to these men who thus dishonor both the written and the incarnate Word, is that this statement must have reference to the humanity of Christ. But a moment's reflection should show that such a conclusion is wide of the mark. The second half of this nineteenth verse must be studied and interpreted in the light of the first half.

It is to be noted that the verse opens by saying “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.” What was it

that He was replying to? Who was it that He was here “answering”? The previous verse quickly decides. He was replying to those who sought to kill Him; He was answering His enemies who were enraged because He had “made himself equal with God.” In what follows, then, we have the Lord’s response to their implied charge of blasphemy. In verse 19 we have the second part of the vindication of His claim that He and the Father were one. Thus it will be seen that the words “The Son can do nothing of himself” respect His Deity and not His humanity, separately considered. Or, more accurately speaking, they concern the Divine glory of the Son of God incarnate.

“The Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do.” Does this mean that His ability was limited? or that His power was restricted?

Do His words signify that when He

“made himself of no reputation (R. V. emptied himself) and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7)

that He was reduced to all the limitations of human nature? To all these questions we return an emphatic and dogmatic No. Instead of pointing to an imperfection, either in His person or power, they, rightly understood, only serve to bring out His peerless excellency. But here as everywhere else, Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, and once we heed this rule, difficulties disappear like the mists before the sun.

It will be seen that in verse 30 we have a strictly parallel statement, and by noting what is added there the one in verse 19 is more easily understood. “The Son can do nothing of himself” of verse 19 is repeated in the “I can do nothing of myself” in verse 30, and then in the closing words of verse 30 we find that the Lord explains His meaning by giving as a reason — “Because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” The limitation is not because of any defect in His person (brought about by the incarnation) nor because of any limitation in His power (voluntary or imposed); it was solely a matter of will. “The Son can do nothing of himself,” literally, “nothing out of himself,” that is, “nothing” as proceeding from or originating with Himself. In other words, the

force of what He said was this: 'I cannot act independently of the Father.' But was that a limitation which amounted to a defect? Indeed no; the very reverse. Do the words "*God that cannot lie*" (Titus 1:2) and "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13) point to a blemish in the Divine nature or character? Nay, verily, they affirm Divine perfections. It was so here in the words of Christ.

But may it not be that Christ is here speaking in view of His mediatorial position, as the servant of the Father? We do not think so, and that for three reasons. In the first place, John's Gospel is not the one which emphasizes His servant-character; that is unfolded in Mark's. In this Gospel it is His Deity, His Divine glory, which is prominent throughout. Therefore, some explanation for this verse must be found consonant with that fact. In the second place, our Lord was not here defending His mediatorship, His Divinely-appointed works; instead, He was replying to those who deemed Him guilty of blasphemy, because He had made Himself equal with God. Our third reason will be developed below.

"The Son can do nothing of himself." This we have attempted to show means, "the Son cannot act independently of the Father." And why could He not? Because *in will* He was absolutely one with the Father. If He were God the Son then His will must be in perfect unison with that of *God* the Father, otherwise, there would be two absolute but conflicting wills, which means that there would be two Gods, the one opposing the other; which in plainer language still, would be affirming that there were two *Supreme* Beings which is, of course, a flat contradiction of terms. It was just because the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, that His will was in fullest harmony with the will of the Father. Man can will independently of God, alienated from Him as he is. Even the angels which kept not their first estate, yea, one above them in rank, the "anointed cherub" himself could, and did say, "I will" (see Isaiah 14:13 and 14, five times repeated). But the Son of God could not, for He was not only very Man of very man but also very God of very God.

It was this in the God-man which distinguished Him from all other men. He never acted independently of the Father. He was always in perfect subjection to the Father's will. There was no will in Him which had to be broken. From start to finish He was in most

manifest agreement with the One who sent Him. His first recorded utterance struck the keynote to His earthly life — “Wist ye not that I must be about *my Father’s* business?” In the temptation when assailed by the Devil, He steadfastly refused to act independently of God. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me” ever characterized His lovely service. And, as He nears the end, we have the same blessed excellency displayed, as we behold Him on His face in the Garden, covered with bloody sweat, as He confronts the thrice awful Cup, yet does He say, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do.” The word for “seeth” (blepo) signifies to contemplate, to perceive, to know. It is used in Romans 7:23; 11:8; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Hebrews 10:25, etc. When, then, the Son exerts His Divine power, it is always in the conscious knowledge that it is the will of the Father it *should be so* exerted.

“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.” Here is an assertion which none but a Divine person (in the most absolute sense of the term) could truthfully make. Because the Son can do nothing but what the Father does, so, on the other hand, “What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” Note well this word “likewise.” Not only does He do *what* the Father does, but He does it as He does it, that is, in a manner comporting with the absolute perfections of their common Divine nature. But what is ever more striking is the all-inclusive “whatsoever.” Not only does He perform His works with the same Divine power and excellency as the Father does His, but the Son also does *all* “whatsoever he (the Father) doeth.” This is proof positive that He is speaking here not in His mediatorial capacity, as the servant, but in His essential character as one absolutely equal with God.

We cannot refrain from quoting here part of the most excellent comments of the late Dr. John Brown on this verse: — “All is *of* the Father — all is *by* the Son. Did the Father create the universe? So did the Son. Does the Father uphold the universe? So does the Son. Does the Father govern the universe? So does the Son. Is the Father the Savior of the world? So is the Son. Surely the Jews did not err

when they concluded that our Lord made Himself 'equal with God.' Surely He who is so intimately connected with God that He does what God does, does all God does, does all in the same manner in which God does it; surely such a person cannot but be equal with God." To this we would add but one word: Scripture also reveals that in the future, too, the will of the Father and of the Son will act in perfect unison, for, in the last chapter of the Bible we read that the throne of Deity on the new earth will be "the throne of God and of the lamb" (Revelation 22:1). But before passing on to the next verse let us pause for a brief moment to make application to ourselves. "The Son can do nothing of himself." How this rebukes the selfwill in all of us! Who is there among the saints who can truthfully say, I can do nothing at my own instance; my life is entirely at God's disposal?

["For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel" \(John 5:20\).](#)

Here again the carnal mind is puzzled. If Christ be the Son of God why does He need to be "shown." When we "show" a child something it is because it is ignorant. When we "show" the traveler the right road, it is because he does not know it. Refuge is sought again in the mediatorship of Christ. But this destroys the beauty of the verse and mars the unity of the passage. What seems to point to an imperfection or limitation in Christ's knowledge only brings out once more His matchless excellency.

"For the Father loveth the Son and showeth him all things that himself doeth." The opening word "For" intimates there is a close connection between this and the verse immediately preceding, as well as with the whole context. It intimates that our Lord is still submitting the proof that He was "equal with God." The argument of this verse in a word is this: The Father has no secrets from the Son. Because He is the Son of God, the Father loveth Him; that is to say, because they are in common possession of the same infinite perfections, there is an ineffable affection of the Father to the Son, and this love is *manifested* by the Father "showing the Son all things." There is no restraint and no constraint between them: there is the most perfect intimacy because of their co-equality. Let me try

to reduce this profound truth to a simple level. If an entire stranger were to visit your home, there are many things you would not think of “showing” him — the family portrait-album for example. But with an intimate friend or a loved relative there would be no such reluctance. The illustration falls far short we know, but perhaps it may help some to grasp better the line of thought we are seeking to present.

But not only do the words “the Father loveth the Son” make manifest the perfect intimacy there is between them, but the additional words “showeth him *all things* that himself doeth” evidences another of the Divine glories of Christ, namely, the absolute *equality of intelligence* that there is between the Father and the Son. Let us again bring the thought down to a human level. What would be the use of discussing with an illiterate person the mathematics of the fourth dimension? What’s the value of taking a child in the first grade and “showing” him the solution of a problem in algebra? Who, then, is capable of understanding all the ways and workings of God? No mere creature. Fallen man is incapable of knowing God. The believer learns but gradually and slowly, and only then as he is taught by the Holy Spirit. Even the unfallen angels know God’s mind but in part — there are things they desire “to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). To whom then could God show the full counsel of His mind? And again we answer, To no mere creature, for the creature however high in rank has no capacity to grasp it. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. Is it not self-evident, then, that if the Father showeth the Son “*all things* that himself doeth” He must be of the *same* mind as the Father? that they are one, absolutely equal in intelligence! Christ has the capacity to apprehend and comprehend “all things that the Father doeth,” therefore, He must be “equal with God,” for none but God could measure the *Father’s* mind perfectly.

“The idea seems to be this, that the love of the Father, and of the Son, their perfect complacency in each other, is manifest in the perfect knowledge which the Son has of the period at which, the purpose for which, and the manner in which, the Divine power equally possessed by them is to be put forth. It is in consequence of this knowledge, as if our Lord had said — ‘That in this case (the

healing of the impotent man) I have exercised Divine power while My Father was exercising it'

“And He adds, ‘Still further — still more extraordinary manifestations of this community of knowledge, will, and operation of the Father, and of the Son, will be made.’ ‘He will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel,’ or ‘that ye shall marvel’; that is, we apprehend, ‘the Son, in consequence of His perfect knowledge of the mind, and will, and operations of His Divine Father, will yet make still more remarkable displays of that Divine power which is equally His Father’s and His own’ — such displays as will fill with amazement all who witness them. What these displays were to be, appears from what follows: He had healed the impotent man, but He was soon to raise to life some who had been dead; nay, at a future period He was to raise to life all the dead and act as the Governor and Judge of all mankind” (Dr. John Brown).

[“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” \(John 5:21\).](#)

This verse presents the fourth proof of Christ’s Deity. Here He affirms His absolute equality with the Father in sovereign rights. This affords further evidence that the Lord Jesus was not here speaking as the dependent Servant, but as the Son of God. He lays claim to Divine sovereignty. The healing of the impotent man was an object lesson: it not only demonstrated His power, but it illustrated His absolute sovereignty. He had not healed the entire company of impotent folk who lay around the Pool; instead, He had singled out just one, and had made him whole. So He works and so He acts in the spiritual realm. He does not quicken (spiritually) all men, but those “whom He will.” He does not quicken the worthy, for there are none.

He does not quicken those who seek quickening, for being dead in sin, none begin to seek until they are quickened. The Son quickeneth whom He will: He says so, that ends the matter. It is not to be reasoned about, but believed. To quicken is to impart life, and to impart life is a Divine prerogative. How this confirms our

interpretation of the previous verses! It is the *Divine rights* of Christ which are here affirmed.

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.” The verse opens with the word “for,” showing it is advancing a reason or furnishing a proof in connection with what had been said previously. In our judgment it looks back first to verse 19 and gives an illustration of “what things soever he (the Father) doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” — the Father quickens, so does the Son. But there is also a direct connection with the verse immediately preceding. There he had referred to “greater works” than healing the impotent man. Here, then, is a specimen — quickening the dead: making alive spiritually those who are dead in sins. This is a further demonstration of His absolute equality with the Father.

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:22, 23).

This declaration that the Father judgeth no man — better “no one” — is especially noteworthy. The Father is the One whom we might most naturally expect to be the Judge. He is the first who was wronged. It is His rights (though not His exclusively) which have been denied. His governmental claims have been set at naught. He was the One who sent here the Lord Jesus who has been despised and rejected. But instead of the Father being the Judge, He hath “committed all judgment unto the Son,” and the reason for this is “that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.” There is then, or more correctly, there will be, absolute equality between the Father and the Son in *Divine honors*.

“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 5:24).

Once more we find the Lord, as in verse 17, linking Himself in closest union with the Father: “heareth *my* Word, and believeth him

that sent me.” But as we have already dwelt at such length on the dominant thought running all through our passage, we turn now to consider other subordinate though most blessed truths. This verse has been a great favorite with the Lord’s people. It has been used of God to bring peace and assurance to many a troubled soul. It speaks of eternal life as a present possession — “*hath* everlasting life,” not shall have when we die, or when the resurrection morning comes. Two things are here mentioned which are evidences and results of having everlasting life, though they are usually regarded as two conditions. The hearing ear and the believing heart are the consequences of having eternal life and not the qualifications for obtaining it. Then it is added, “and shall not come into condemnation”: this guarantees the future —

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

No condemnation for the believer because it fell upon his Substitute. Another reason why the believer shall not come into condemnation is because he has “passed from death,” which is the realm of condemnation, “into life.”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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” (John 5:25).

This continues the same thought as in the previous verse, though adding further details. “The dead shall hear:” what a paradox to the carnal mind! Yet all becomes luminous when we remember that it is the voice of the Son of God they hear. *His* voice alone can penetrate into the place of death, and because His voice is a life-giving voice, the dead hear it and live. The capacity to hear accompanies the power of the Voice that speaks, and it is just because that Voice is a life-giving one that the dead hear it at all, and hearing, live. Here then is the sixth proof presented for the Deity of Christ: the Son claims absolute equality with the Father in the power to give *life*.

“For as the Father has life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26).

This confirms what we have just said above, while bringing in one further amplification. The Father hath “life in himself.” “It belongs to His nature; He has received it from no one; it is an essential attribute of His necessarily existing nature: He so has life that He can impart, withdraw, and restore it to whomsoever He pleases. He is the fountain of all life. All in heaven and in earth who have life, have received it from Him. They have not life in themselves” (Dr. John Brown).

Now in like manner the life of Christ is not a derived life. “In him was life” (John 1:4). He is able to communicate life to others because the Father hath “given to the Son to have life in himself.” The word “given” must be understood figuratively and not literally, in the sense of appointed, not imparted: see its usage in Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 55:4. So also the word “given him to have,” signifies to hold or administer. Thus, inasmuch as all creatures live and move and have their being in God, but in contrast from them Christ has “life *in himself*,” He cannot be a mere creature but must be “equal with God.”

“And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 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” (John 5:27-29).

This brings us to the seventh proof for the absolute Deity of Christ: He is co-equal with the Father in *judicial authority and power*.

“And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” The “also” seems to point back to verse 22, where we are told, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Judgment has been committed to the Son in order that all should honor Him even as they honor the Father. But here in verse 27 Christ gives an additional reason: the Father has also appointed the Lord Jesus to execute judgment “because he is the Son of man.” It was because the Son of God had become clothed with flesh and walked this earth as Man, that He was despised and rejected and His Divine glories disowned. This supplies a further reason why it is meet that the Son of man should

be Judge in the last great day. The despised One shall be in the place of supreme honor and authority. All will be compelled to bow the knee before Him; and thus will He be glorified before them and His outraged rights vindicated.

Next follows a reference to the resurrection of all that are in the graves. These are divided into two classes. First, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life. This refers to the resurrection of the saints. They that have “done good” is a characteristic description of them. It has reference to their walk which manifests the new nature within them. In the previous verses (24, 25) we have had life, eternal life, imparted to the spiritually dead by the sovereign power of the Son of God. This is His own life which is communicated to them. The Christ-life within is seen by Christ-like acts without. This is forcibly and beautifully brought out in the language which the Lord Jesus here uses when referring to His people. Just as in Acts 10:38 the apostle sums up the earthly life of Christ by saying He “went about *doing good*,” so here the Lord Jesus speaks of His own as “they that have *done good*,” that is, have manifested His own life. These will come forth at the time of His appearing (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16); come forth “unto a resurrection of life” for then they shall enter fully and perfectly into the unhindered activities and joys of that life which is life indeed.

“And they that have done evil” describes the great company of the unsaved. These, too, shall “come forth.” All the ungodly dead will hear His voice, and obey it. They refused to hearken to Him while He spoke words of grace and truth, but then they shall be compelled to hear Him as He utters the dread summons for them to appear before the great white throne. They would not believe on Him as the Savior of sinners, but they will have to own Him as “Lord of the dead” (Romans 14:9). Unspeakably solemn is this. Not a vestige of hope is held out for them. It is not a resurrection of probation as some modern perverters of God’s truth are now teaching, but it is the resurrection “unto damnation.” Nothing awaits them but impartial judgment, the formal and public pronouncement of their sentence of doom, and after that nothing but an eternity of torment spent in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. As they had sinned in physical bodies so shall they suffer in physical bodies. Instead of

having glorified bodies, they shall be raised in bodies marred by sin and made hideous by evil — “shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2) describes them. Though capable of enduring “tribulation and anguish” (Romans 2:9) they shall not be annihilated by the flames (any more than were the physical bodies of the three Hebrews in Babylon’s fiery furnace) but continue forever — “salted with fire” (Mark 9:49): the “salt” speaks of a *preservative* element which prevents decay.

“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).

The first part of the verse need not detain us, for it has already received consideration under our exposition of verse 19. The second half of the verse adds a further word concerning the judgment. “My judgment is just:” this is profoundly solemn. Christ will deal not in grace, but in inflexible righteousness. He will administer justice, not mercy. This, once more, excludes every ray of hope for all who are raised “unto damnation.”

Two additional thoughts in connection with the Deity of Christ come out in these last verses. First, the fact that “all that are in the graves shall hear” the voice of Christ and shall “come forth,” proves that He is far more than the most exalted creature. Who but God is able to regather all the scattered elements which have gone to corruption! Second, who but God is capable of acting as Judge in the Great Assize! None but He can read the heart, and none but He possesses the necessary wisdom for such a stupendous task as determining the sentence due to each one of that vast assemblage which will stand before the great white throne. Thus we see that from start to finish this wonderful passage sets forth the Godhood of the Savior. Let us then honor Him even as we honor the Father, and prostrate ourselves before Him in adoring worship.

Let the interested reader study carefully the following questions preparatory to our next lesson on John 5:31-47: —

1. How many witnesses are there here to the Deity of Christ?
2. What is the meaning of verse 31?

3. What is the significance of the first half of verse 34, after Christ had already referred to “John”?
4. What warning is there in the second half of verse 35?
5. What is the force of “ye think” in verse 39?
6. Who is referred to in the second half of verse 43?
7. What is the moral connection between receiving honor of men and not believing in Christ? verse 44.

# JOHN 5:31-47

## THE DEITY OF CHRIST: THREEFOLD WITNESS TO IT

We begin with our usual Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ's Witness not independent of the Father: verses 31, 32.
2. The Witness of John: verses 33, 34.
3. Christ's Witness to John: verse 35.
4. The Witness of Christ's Works: verse 36.
5. The Witness of the Father: verses 37, 38.
6. The Witness of the Scriptures: verse 39.
7. Christ's Witness against the Jews: verses 40-47.

As we pass from chapter to chapter it is ever needful to keep in mind the character and scope of this fourth Gospel. Its chief design is to present the Divine glories of Christ. It was written, no doubt, in its first and local application to refute the heresies concerning the person of the Lord Jesus which flourished toward the end of the first century. Less than fifty years after the Lord departed from these scenes and returned to His Father in heaven, the horrible system of Gnosticism, which denied the essential Deity of the Savior, was spread widely throughout those lands where the Gospel had been preached. Whilst it was generally allowed that Christ was a unique personage, yet, that He was "equal with God" was denied by many. Nor is that very surprising when we stop to think how much there was which would prove a stumbling block to the natural man.

Outwardly, to human eyes, Christ appeared to be an ordinary man. Born into a peasant family; cradled amid the most humble surroundings; carried away into Egypt to escape the cruel edict of Herod, and returning later, only to grow to manhood's estate in obscurity; working for years, most probably, at the carpenter's bench — what was there to denote that He was the Lord of Glory? Then, as He began His public ministry, appearing not as the great of this world are accustomed to appear, with much pomp and ostentation; but, instead, as the meek and lowly One. Attended not by an

imposing retinue of angels, but by a few poor and unlettered fishermen. His claims rejected by the religious leaders of that day; the tide of popular opinion turning against Him; the very ones who first hailed Him with their glad Hosannas, ending by crying, "Away with him: crucify him." Finally, nailed in shame to the cruel tree; silent to the challenge to descend from it; and there breathing out His spirit — that, that was the last the world saw of Him.

And now by the year A. D. 90 almost all of His original disciples would be dead. Of the twelve apostles who had accompanied Him during His public ministry, only John remained. On every side were teachers denying the Deity of Christ. There was thus a real need for an inspired, authoritative, systematic presentation of the manifold glories of His divine person. The Holy Spirit therefore moved John — the one who of all the early disciples knew Christ best, the one whose spiritual discernment was the keenest, the one who had enjoyed the inestimable privilege of leaning on the Master's bosom to write this fourth Gospel. In it abundant evidence is furnished to satisfy the most credulous of the Deity of the Lord Jesus. It is to the written Word God now refers all who desire to know the truth concerning His beloved Son, and in it are presented the "many infallible proofs" for the Godhood of our blessed Redeemer. Chiefest of these are to be found in John's Gospel.

In the chapter we are now studying we find record of a remarkable miracle performed by the Lord Jesus which signally displayed His Divine power. He had singled out a most hopeless case and by a word had made whole, instantly, one that had suffered with an infirmity for thirty and eight years. Because this miracle had been performed on the Sabbath day, the Jews persecuted the Lord Jesus. In gracious condescension the Lord replied to their criticism by giving them a sevenfold declaration of His equality with the Father. This we examined at some length in maintaining it, so immeasurable is the blessing when received, so tremendous is the stake involved in its loss, God has vouchsafed us the amplest, clearest, fullest evidence.

["If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" \(John 5:31\).](#)

Every commentator we have consulted expounds this verse as follows: The witness which I have just borne to Myself would not be valid unless it is supported by that of others. The law of God requires two or three witnesses for the truth to be established. Therefore if I bear witness of Myself, says Christ, and there is none to confirm it, it is “not true,” i.e., it is not convincing to others. But we most humbly dissent from any such interpretation. The word of a mere man does need confirmation: but not so that of God the Son. To affirm or suggest that His witness must be ratified by the testimony of others so as to establish its validity, is deeply dishonoring to Him. And we are both amazed and saddened that such a view should be put forth by many excellent men.

“If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” The key to this verse lies in what has gone before. Divorce it from its context, and we must expect to find it difficult; but examine it in our last chapter; now, in the passage before us, we find that He closed by bringing in the evidence of various unimpeachable witnesses who testified to the veracity of His claims. In view, then, of what is to be found here, there can be no excuse whatever for ignorance, still less for unbelief, upon this all-important subject. So bright was Christ’s glory, so concerned was the Father in the light of its setting, and all becomes clear. This verse simply reiterates in another form what we find the Savior saying at the beginning of the previous verse, can of mine own self do nothing” means, I cannot act independently of the Father: I am so absolutely one with Him that His will is My will; mine, His. So, now, He declares, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” He speaks hypothetically — “if.” “I bear witness of myself” means, If I bear witness *independently* of the Father. In such a case, “my witness is not true.” And why? Because such would be insubordination. The Son can no more bear witness of Himself independently of the Father, than He can of Himself work independently of the Father.

“There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true” (John 5:32).

This explains the previous verse and confirms our interpretation of it. The “other” who is here referred to as “bearing witness” of Him, is not John the Baptist, as some have strangely supposed, but the

Father Himself. Reference, not appeal, is made to John in verses 33, 34. Observe now that our Lord did not here say, "There is One that beareth witness of me" and His witness is true, but "there is another that beareth witness of me." He would no more dissever the Father and His witness from Himself, than He would bear witness to Himself independently of the Father. This is strikingly confirmed by what we read in John 8:

"The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true... Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me" (verses 13-16).

"Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth" (John 5:33).

Here our Lord reminds "the Jews" (verse 16) how, when they had sent an embassy unto His forerunner (see John 1:19), that he "bear witness unto the truth." Notice the abstract form in which this is put. Christ did not say, "He bear witness unto me," but "unto the truth." This witness is recorded in John 1:20-27. First, John confessed that he was not the Christ, but simply "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." Then, he testified to the presence of One in their midst whom they knew not, One of whom he said, "He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Such was the Baptist's witness to the delegates of these same Jews.

"But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved" (John 5:34).

The Son of God continues to occupy the same high ground from which He had spoken throughout this interview. "I receive not testimony from man" shows that He had not appealed to the witness of John in confirmation of His own declarations. His purpose was quite otherwise: "These things I say, that ye might be saved." The witness which John had borne to "the truth" was fitted to have a salutary effect on those who heard him. John's testimony was a merciful concession which God had made to the need of Israel.

Christ Himself did not stand in need of it; but they did. God sent His messenger before His Son to prepare the way for Him. His ministry was designed to arouse men's attention and to produce in them a sense of their deep need of the One who was about to be manifested.

“But I receive not testimony from man.” This word “receive” is explained to us in verse 44 where it is interchanged with “seek.” It means to lay hold of, or grasp at. Christ would not demean Himself by subpoenaing human witnesses. His claim to be equal with God rested on surer ground than the testimony of a man. But He had reminded these Jews of what John had said to their representatives on an earlier occasion, and this that they “might be saved,” for salvation comes by believing God's “witness unto the truth.”

“He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35).

This was most gracious of Christ. John had given faithful witness to the One who was to come after him; and now the Son of God bears witness to him. A beautiful illustration is this of the promise that if we confess Christ before men, so He will yet confess us before God. “A burning and shining light” — more correctly, “lamp,” see R.V. — the Lord calls him. Burning inwardly, shining outwardly. John's light had not been hid under a bushel, but it had shone “before men.” Ah! dear reader, will the Savior be able to say of you, in a coming day, “He was a burning and shining lamp”? Is the light that is within thee “burning” or is it just flickering? Is your lamp “trimmed,” and so “shining,” or is it shedding but a feeble and sickly glow? Great is the need for burning and shining “lamps” in the world today. The shadows are fast lengthening, the darkness increases, and the “midnight” hour draws on apace.

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:11, 12).

“And ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35).

This provides us with an illustration of the stony-ground hearers of the parable of the Sower. Concerning this class Christ says,

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while” (Matthew 13:20, 21).

Such were these Jews: “for a season” they rejoiced in John’s light. But the difference between real believers and mere professors is not in how they begin but how they end. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved”: enduring to the end is not a condition of salvation, but an evidence of it. So, again, when Christ says, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed:” continuing in Christ’s word is a proof that we are His disciples. We take it that which caused these Jews to “rejoice” for a season in John’s light, was the testimony which he bore to the Messiah, then about to appear. This was good news indeed, for to them this meant deliverance from the Roman yoke and the destruction of all their enemies. But when the Messiah was actually manifested He instead announced that He had come to save the lost, and when He demanded repentance and faith, their joy soon faded away.

“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” (John 5:36).

Here is the first witness to which Christ appeals in proof of His Deity. His “works” bore unmistakable witness to Him. He gave hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, sight to the blind, cleansing to the leper, deliverance to the captives of the Devil, life to the dead. He walked the waves, stilled the wind, calmed the sea, He turned water into wine, cleansed the Temple single-handed, and fed a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes. And these miracles were performed by His own inherent power. To these works He now directs attention as furnishing proof of His Deity. Quite frequently did He appeal to His “works” as affording Divine testimony: see John 10:25, 38; 14:11; 15:24.

The late Bishop Ryle called attention to five things in connection with our Lord's miracles.

“First, their *number*: they were not a few only, but very many. Second, their *greatness*: they were not little, but mighty interferences with the ordinary course of nature. Third, their publicity: they were not done in a corner, but generally in open day, and before many witnesses, and often before enemies. Fourth, their character: they were almost always works of love, mercy and compassion, helpful and beneficent to man, and not merely barren exhibitions of power. Fifth, their direct appeal to man's senses: they were visible, and would bear any examination. The difference between them and the boasted miracles of Rome, on all these points, is striking and conclusive.”

To these we might add two other features: Sixth, their artlessness. They were not staged mechanically: they happened in the natural course of our Lord's ministry. There was nothing pre-arranged about them. Seventh, their efficacy. There was as much difference between the miracles of healing performed by Christ and those of His miserable imitators which are being so widely heralded in our day, as there is between His teaching and that given out by these pretenders who claim to heal in His name. Christ's cures were instantaneous, not gradual; complete and perfect, not faulty and disappointing.

“The same works that I do, bear witness of me.” Ere passing on to the next verse, we pause to apply these words to ourselves. Our works, too, bear witness of us. If ours are “dead works,” wood, hay, and stubble which shall be burned up in the coming Day, that proves we are carnal, walking after the flesh; and such a witness will dishonor and grieve Him whose name we bear. But if we abound in “good works,” this will show that we are walking after the spirit, and men (our fellow-believers) seeing our good works will glorify our Father which is in heaven. What, then, my reader, is the “witness” which your “works” are bearing? What the writer's? Let us “be careful to maintain good works? (Titus 3:8).

“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” (John 5:37).

The miracles performed by our Lord were not the only nor the most direct evidence which proved His Deity. The Father Himself had borne witness. The majority of the commentators refer this to the baptism of Christ, when the Father's voice declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But we scarcely think this is correct. Immediately following, our Lord went on to say, "Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape." What, then, would be the force of Christ here appealing to the Father's witness at the Jordan if these detractors of His had not heard that Voice? Personally, we think that Christ refers, rather, to the witness which the Father had borne to His Son through the prophets during Old Testament times. This seems to give more meaning to what follows — the Old Testament economy was characterized by an *invisible* God, neither His voice being heard, nor His shape seen.

**"And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not" (John 5:38).**

Here our Lord begins to make solemn application of what He had said to the consciences and hearts of these Jews. Note the awful charges which He brings against them: "ye have not his word abiding in you" (verse 38); "Ye will not come to me" (verse 40); "ye have not the love of God in you" (verse 42); "ye receive me not" (verse 43); "ye seek not the honor that cometh from God only" (verse 44); "ye believe not" (verse 47). But notice carefully the basic charge: "ye have not his word abiding in you." This explained all the others. This was the cause of which the others were but the inevitable effects. If God's Word has no place in man's hearts they will not come to Christ, they will not receive Him, they will not love God, and they will not seek the honor that cometh from God only. It is only as the Word is hidden in our hearts that we are preserved from sinning against God.

**"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).**

This is the last witness which our Lord cites, and, for us, it is the most important. John has long since passed away; the "words" of Christ are no longer before men's eyes; the voice of the Father is no more heard; but the testimony of the Scriptures abides. The

Scriptures testified of Christ, and affirmed His Deity. Their witness was the climax. The Holy Writings, given by inspiration of God, were the final court of appeal. What importance and authority does He attach to them! Beyond them there was no appeal: above them no higher authority: after them no further witness. It is blessed to note the order in which Christ placed the three witnesses to which He appealed in proof of His equality with God.

**First**, there was the witness of His own Divine works.

**Second**, there was the witness which the Father had borne to Him through the prophets.

**Third**, there was the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, written by men moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus in these three witnesses there is a remarkable reference made to each of the three Persons in the Holy Trinity.

“Search the Scriptures” was both an appeal and a command. It is to be read, as in our A.V., in the imperative mood. The proof for this is as follows: First, the *usage* of the word. The Bible is its own interpreter. If scripture be compared with scripture its meaning will be plain. In John 7:52 we find the only other occurrence of the Greek word (*ereunao*) in John’s Gospel, here translated “search”; “They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? *Search*, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.” When the Pharisees said to Nicodemus “Search and look,” they were *bidding* him search the Scriptures. Thus, in both instances, the word has the imperative and not the indicative force. Again; to give the verb here the indicative force in John 5:39 is to make the first half of the verse pointless; but to render it in the imperative gives it a meaning in full accord with what precedes and what follows. “For in them ye think ye have eternal life.” The pronoun “ye” is emphatic. The word “think” does not imply it was a doubtful point, or merely a matter of human opinion. It is rather as though Christ said unto them, ‘This is one of the articles of your faith: ye think (are persuaded), and rightly so; then act on it. Search the Scriptures (in which you are assured there is eternal life) and you will find that they, too, testify of Me.’ The word “think” does not imply a doubt, but affirms an assurance. (Cf. Matthew 22:42, etc.).

“Search the Scriptures.” Here is a command from the Lord. The authority of His Godhood is behind it. “Search,” He says; not merely “read.” The Greek word is one that was used in connection with hunting. It referred to the hunter stalking game. When he discovered the tracks of an animal, he concentrated all his attention on the ground before him, diligently searching for other marks which would lead him to his quarry. In a similar way, we are to study God’s Word, minutely examining each expression, tracing every occurrence of it, and ascertaining its meaning from its usage. The grand motive for such earnest study is, that the Scriptures “testify” of Christ. May writer and reader give daily heed to this Divine admonition, to “Search” the Scriptures.

“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

It was not lack of evidence but perversity of will which kept these Jews from coming to Christ. And it is so still. The Lord Jesus stands ready to receive all who come to Him; but by nature men are unwilling, unwilling to come to Him that they “might have life.” But why is this? It is because they fail to realize their awful peril: did they but know that they are standing on the brink of the Pit, they would flee from the wrath to come. Why is it? It is because they have no sense of their deep and desperate need: did they but apprehend their awful condition their wickedness, their blindness, their hardheartedness, their depravity — they would hasten to the great Physician to be healed by Him. Why is it? It is because the carnal mind is enmity against God, and Christ is God.

“I receive not honor from men” (John 5:41). Here again the Lord maintains His dignity and insists upon His Divine self-sufficiency. I “receive not” signifies, as in verses 34 and 44, “I seek not” honor from men.

“When I state My claims, and complain that you disregard them, it is not because I wish to ingratiate Myself with you; not because I covet your approbation or that of any man, or set of men. He did not need their sanction: He could receive no honor from their applause. His object was to secure the approbation of His Divine Father, by faithfully executing the commission with which He was entrusted;

and so far as they were concerned, His desire was not that He should be applauded by them, but that they should be saved by Him. If He regretted, and He did most deeply regret their obstinate unbelief and impenitence, it was for their own sakes, and not for His own. Such was the unearthly, unambitious spirit of our Lord, and such should be the spirit of all His ministers” (Dr. John Brown).

“But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you”  
(John 5:42).

How this makes manifest the omniscience of Christ! He who searcheth the heart knew the state of these Jews. They posed as worshippers of the true and living God. They appeared to be very jealous of His honor. They claimed to be most punctilious in the observance of His Sabbath. But Christ was not deceived. He knew they had not the love of God in them, and this was why they refused to come to Him for life, It is so now. The reason why men despise the claims of Christ is not because of any want of evidence on the side of those claims, but because of a sinful indisposition on their part to attend to those claims. They have not the love of God in them; if they had, they would receive and worship His Son.

“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”  
(John 5:43).

Unspeakingly solemn is this. Israel’s rejection of Christ has only prepared the way for them to accept the Antichrist, for it is to him our Lord referred in the second part of this verse. Just as Eve’s rejection of the truth of God laid her open to accept the Devil’s lie, so Israel’s rejection of the true Messiah has thoroughly prepared them, morally, to receive the false Messiah; who will come in his own name, doing his own pleasure, and seeking glory from men. Thus will he thoroughly expose the corrupt heart of the natural man. How this exhibits what is in the fallen creature and demonstrates his depravity!

“How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only” (John 5:44).

“Honor” signifies approbation or praise. While these Jews were making it their chief aim to win the good opinion of each other, and remained more or less indifferent to the approval and approbation of God, they would not come to Christ for life. To come to Christ they must humble themselves in the dust, by taking the place of lost sinners before Him. And to receive Him as their Lord and Savior, to live henceforth for the glory of that One who was despised and rejected of men, would at once separate them from the world, and would bring down upon them contempt and persecution. But there is no middle ground: “the friendship of the world is enmity with God.” If we are determined to be honored and smiled upon by our fellowmen, we shall remain alienated from God.

“Men are deceived today by the thought of building up man, the improvement of the race, the forming of character, holding on to themselves as though all that man needed was change of direction. Man is himself evil, a sinner by nature, utterly alienated from the life of God. He needs life, a new one. For what else did Christ come but that He might give it? He is not to be received with honors such as men pay to high officials, for they are like the men who pay the honor, but He is from above and above all, and has eternal life to give. He needs emptiness for His fulness, sinfulness for His holiness, sinners for His salvation, death for His life; and he who can make out his case of being lost and helpless gets all. It is not that men should do their best by leaving off vices and reforming, and pay devout respect to the name of Jesus and to religious rites, adding this to their goodness for God’s acceptance. It is that they should be as the poor man in the beginning of this chapter, indebted to Christ for everything: they must be receivers instead of givers. Receiving honor from one another vitiates the whole idea in regard to God and His Christ. We honor Him only when we are saved by Him; then, as saved, worshipping and rejoicing in Christ Jesus the Lord” (Malachi Taylor).

“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John 5:45, 46).

Our Lord concludes by intimating to these Jews that they would yet have to give an account of their rejection of Him before the tribunal of God, and there they would see as their accuser the great legislator of whom they boasted, but whose testimony they rejected. Here, then, was the final reason why they would not come to Him for life — they believed not the written Word of God.

“There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.” How solemn and searching is this! If there is one thing those Jews thought they believed, it was Moses and his writings. They contended earnestly for the law: they venerated the name of Moses above almost all of their national heroes. They would have been ready to die for what Moses taught. And yet here is the Son of God solemnly declaring that these Jews did not believe Moses, and furnishing proof by showing that if they had really believed Moses’ writings they had believed in Christ, of whom Moses wrote. How terribly deceptive is the human heart!

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

O, dear reader, make certain that you believe, really, savingly believe on the Son of God.

“But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:47).

How this exposes the “Higher Critics!” If they believe not the writings of Moses, no matter what their ecclesiastical connections or religious professions, it is sure proof that they are unsaved men — men who have not believed in Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures are of equal authority with the teaching of Christ: they are equally the Word of God.

Let the following questions be studied for the next lesson: —

1. What do the opening words of verse 1 denote?
2. In what respects is verse 2 repeated today?
3. What is the significance of verse 4 coming just before the feeding of the multitude?
4. How may we apply to ourselves Christ’s questions in verse 5?

5. Wherein do Philip and Andrew represent us? verses 7-9.
6. What are the spiritual lessons suggested by verse 11?

# JOHN 6:1-13

## CHRIST FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

Of all the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus the feeding of the five thousand is the only one recorded by each of the four Evangelists. This at once intimates that there must be something about it of unusual importance, and therefore it calls for our most diligent study. The Holy Spirit has — if we may reverently employ such language — described this miracle in the most matter-of-fact terms. No effort is made to emphasize the marvel of it. There is an entire absence of such language as an uninspired pen would naturally have employed to heighten the effect on the reader. And yet, notwithstanding the simplicity and exceeding brevity of the narrative, it is at once evident that this incident of the feeding of the hungry multitude was a signal example of Christ's almighty power. As Bishop Ryle has noted, of all the wonderful works which our Savior did none was quite so public as this, and none other was performed before so many witnesses. Our Lord is here seen supplying the bodily needs of a great crowd by means of five loaves and two small fishes. Food was called into existence which did not exist before. To borrow another thought from Bishop Ryle: In healing the sick and in raising the dead, something was amended or restored which *already* existed; but here was an absolute creation. Only one other miracle in any wise resembles it — His first, when He made wine out of the water. These two miracles belong to a class by themselves, and it is surely significant, yea most suggestive, that the one reminds us of His precious blood, while the other points to His holy body, broken for us. And here is, we believe, the chief reason why this miracle is mentioned by all of the four Evangelists: it shadowed forth the *gift of Christ Himself*. His other miracles exhibited His power and illustrated His work, but this one in a peculiar way sets forth the person of Christ, the Bread of Life.

Why, then, was this particular miracle singled out for special prominence? Above, three answers have been suggested, which may be summarized thus: First, because there was an evidential value to this miracle which excelled that of all others. Some of our Lord's miracles were wrought in private, or in the presence of only a small

company; others were of a nature that made it difficult, in some cases impossible, for sceptics to examine them. But here was a miracle, performed in the open, before a crowd of witnesses which were to be numbered by the thousand. Second, because of the intrinsic nature of the miracle. It was a creation of food: the calling into existence of what before had no existence. Third, because of the typical import of the miracle. It spoke directly of the person of Christ. To these may be added a fourth answer: The fact that this miracle of the feeding of the hungry multitude is recorded by all the Evangelists intimates that it has a universal application. Matthew's mention of it suggests to us that it foreshadows Christ, in a coming day, feeding Israel's poor — cf. Psalm 132:15. Mark's mention of it teaches us what is the chief duty of God's servants — to break the Bread of Life to the starving. Luke's mention of it announces the sufficiency of Christ to meet the needs of all men. John's mention of it tells us that Christ is the Food of God's people.

Before we consider the miracle itself we must note its setting — the manner in which it is here introduced to us. And ere doing this we will follow our usual custom and present an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ followed into Galilee by a great multitude, verses 1, 2.
2. Christ retires to a mountain with His disciples, verse 3.
3. Time: just before the Passover, verse 4.
4. The testing of Philip, verses 5-7.
5. The unbelief of Andrew, verses 8, 9.
6. The feeding of the multitude, verses 10, 11.
7. The gathering up of the fragments, verses 12, 13.

“After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1).

“After these things”: the reference is to what is recorded in the previous chapter — the healing of the impotent man, the persecution by the Jews because this had been done on the Sabbath day, their determination to kill Him because He had made Himself equal with God, the lengthy reply made by our Lord. After these things, the Lord left Jerusalem and Judea and “went over the sea of Galilee.” It is similar to what was before us in John 4:1-3. The Son of God

would not remain and cast precious pearls before swine. He departed from those who despised and rejected Him. Very solemn is this, and a warning to every unbeliever who may read these lines.

“And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased” (John 6:2).

How completely these people failed in their discernment and appreciation of the person of Christ! They saw in Him only a wonderful Magician who could work miracles, a clever Physician that could heal the sick. They failed to perceive that He was the Savior of sinners and the Messiah of Israel. They were blind to His Divine glory. And is it any otherwise with the great multitude today? Alas, few of them see in Christ anything more than a wonderful Teacher and a beautiful Example.

“And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.” How sadly true to life. It is still idle curiosity and the love of excitement which commonly gathers crowds together. And how what we read of here is being repeated before our eyes in many quarters today. When some professional evangelist is advertised as a ‘Faith-healer’ what crowds of sick folk will flock to the meetings! How anxious they are for physical relief, and yet, what little real concern they seem to have for their soul’s healing!

“And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples” (John 6:3).

This may be regarded as the sequel to what we read of in verse 2, or it may be connected with verse 1, and then verse 2 would be considered as a parenthesis. Probably both are equally permissible. If we take verse 2 as giving the cause why our Lord retired to the mountain with His disciples, the thought would be that of Christ withdrawing from the unbelieving world. The miracles drew many after Him, but only a few to Him. He knew why this great multitude “followed him,” and it is solemn to see Him withdrawing to the mountain with His disciples. He will not company with the unbelieving world: His place is among His own. If verse 3 be read right on after verse 1, then we view the Savior departing from Judea,

weariness (cf. Mark 6:31) with the unbelief and self-sufficiency of those in Jerusalem.

“He went up into a mountain into another atmosphere, setting forth the elevation with the Father to which He retired for refreshment of spirit” (Malachi Taylor).

Compare John 6:15 and John 7:53 to John 8:2 for other examples in John’s Gospel.

“And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh” (John 6:4).

This seems introduced here in order to point again to the empty condition to Judaism at this time. The Passover was nigh, but the Lamb of God who was in their midst was not wanted by the formal religionists. Yea, it was because they were determined to “kill him” (John 5:18), that He had withdrawn into Galilee. Well, then, may the Holy Spirit remind us once more that the Passover had degenerated into “a feast of the Jews.” How significant is this as an introductory word to what follows! The Passover looks back to the night when the children of Israel feasted on the lamb; but here we see their descendants hungering! Their physical state was the outward sign of their emptiness of soul. Later, we shall see how this verse supplies us with one of the keys to the dispensational significance of our passage.

“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?” (John 6:5).

While the multitude did not know Christ, His heart went out in tender pity to them. Even though an unworthy motive had drawn this crowd after Christ, He was not indifferent to their need. Matthew, in his account, tells us

“And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them” (Matthew 14:14).

So also Mark (Mark 6:34). The absence of this sentence here in John is one of the innumerable evidences of the Divine authorship of Scripture. Not only is every word inspired, but every word is in its suited place. The “compassion” of Christ, though noted frequently

by the other Evangelists, is never referred to by John, who dwells upon the dignity and glory of His Divine person. Compassion is more than pity. Compassion signifies to suffer with, along side of, another. Thus the mention of Christ's compassion by Matthew tells us how near the Messiah had come to His people; while the reference to it in Mark shows how intimately the Servant of Jehovah entered into the sufferings of those to whom He ministered. The absence of this word in John, indicates His elevation above men. Thus we see how everything is most suitably and beautifully placed. And how much we lose by our ungodly haste and carelessness as we fail to mark and appreciate these lovely little touches of the Divine Artist! May Divine grace constrain both writer and reader to handle the Holy Book more reverently, and take more pains to acquaint ourselves with its exhaustless riches. It would be a delight to tarry here, and notice other little details mentioned by the different evangelists which are omitted from John's account — such as the fact that Matthew tells us (before the miracle was performed) that “it was evening,” and that the disciples bade their Master “send the multitude away” — but perhaps more will be accomplished if we leave the reader to search them out for himself.

“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great multitude come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do” (John 6:5, 6).

In reading the Scriptures we fail to derive from them the blessings most needed unless we apply them to our own hearts and lives. Unlike all others, the Bible is a living book: It is far more than a history of the past. Stript of their local and incidental details, the sacred narratives depict characters living and incidents transpiring today. God changes not, nor do the motives and principles of His actions. Human nature also is the same in this twentieth century as it was in the first. The world is the same, the Devil is the same, the trials of faith are the same. Let, then, each Christian reader view Philip here as representing himself. Philip was confronted with a trying situation. It was the Lord who caused him to be so circumstanced. The Lord's design in this was to “prove” or test him. Let us now apply this to ourselves.

What happened to Philip is, in principle and essence, happening daily in our lives. A trying, if not a difficult, situation confronts us; and we meet with them constantly. They come not by accident or by chance; instead, they are each arranged by the hand of the Lord. They are God's testings of our faith. They are sent to "prove" us. Let us be very simple and practical. A bill comes unexpectedly; how are we to meet it? The morning's mail brings us tidings which plunge us into an unlooked-for perplexity; how are we to get out of it? A cog slips in the household's machinery, which threatens to wreck the daily routine; what shall we do? An unanticipated demand is suddenly made upon us; how shall we meet it? Now, dear friends, how do such experiences find us? Do we, like Philip and Andrew did, look at our resources? Do we rack our minds to find some solution? or do our first thoughts turn to the Lord Jesus, who has so often helped us in the past? Here, right here, is the test of our faith.

O, dear reader, have we learned to spread each difficulty, as it comes along, before God? Have we formed the habit of instinctively turning to Him? What is your feebleness in comparison with His power! What is your emptiness in comparison with His ocean fulness? Nothing! Then look daily to Him in simple faith, resting on His sure promise, "My God shall supply all your need" (Philippians 4:19). Ah! you may answer, It is easy to offer such advice, but it is far from easy to act on it. True. Yea, of yourself it is impossible. Your need, and my need, is to ask for faith, to p/cad for grace, to cry unto God for such a sense of helplessness that we shall lean on Christ, and on Him alone. Thus, ask and wait, and you shall find Him as good as His word.

*"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalm 43:5).*

The birds without barn,  
Or storehouse are fed;  
From them let us learn  
To trust for our bread.

His saints what is fitting

Shall ne'er be denied,  
So long as, 'tis written "  
The Lord will provide."

When Satan appears,  
To stop up our path,  
And fills us with fears,  
We triumph by faith:

He cannot take from us,  
Though oft he has tried,  
The heart-cheering promise,  
"The Lord will provide."

["Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little" \(John 6:7\).](#)

Let us see in Philip, once more, a portrait of ourselves. First, what does this answer of Philip reveal? It shows he was occupied with circumstances. He was looking on the things which are seen — the size of the multitude and such a look is always a barrier in the way of faith. He made a rapid calculation of how much money it would require to provide even a frugal meal for such a crowd; but he calculated without Christ! His answer was the language of unbelief — "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may *take a little*." Fancy talking of "a little" in the presence of Infinite Power and Infinite Grace! His unbelief was also betrayed by the very amount he specified — two hundred pennyworth.

Nowhere in Scripture are numbers used haphazardly. Two hundred is a multiple of twenty, and in Scripture twenty signifies *a vain expectancy*, a coming short of God's appointed time or deliverance. For example, in Genesis 31:41 we learn how that Jacob waited *twenty* years to gain possession of his wives and property; but it was not until the twenty-first that God's appointed deliverance came. From Judges 4:3 we learn how that Israel waited twenty years for emancipation from Jabin's oppression; but it was not until the twenty-first that God's appointed deliverance came. So in 1 Samuel 7:2 we learn how that the ark abode in Kirjath-Jearim for twenty

years, but it was in the twenty-first that God delivered it. As, then, twenty speaks of insufficiency, a coming short of God's appointed deliverance, so two hundred conveys the same idea in an *intensified* form. Two hundred is always found in Scripture in an evil connection. Let the reader consult (be sure to look them up) Joshua 7:21; Judges 17:4; 1 Samuel 30:10; 2 Samuel 14:26; Revelation 9:16. So the number here in John 6:7 suitably expressed Philip's *unbelief*.

How surprising was this failure in the faith of Philip. One would have supposed that after all the disciples had witnessed of the Lord's wonder-working power they had learned by this time that all fulness dwelt in Him. We should have supposed their faith was strong and their hearts calm and confident. Ah — *should* we? Would not our own God-dishonoring unbelief check such expectations? Have we not discovered how weak our faith is! How obtuse our understanding! How earthly our minds and hearts! In vain does the Lord look within us sometimes for even a ray of that faith which glorifies Him. Instead of counting on the Lord, we, like Philip, are occupied with nature's resources. Beware, then, of condemning the unbelief of Philip, lest you be found condemning yourself too.

How often has the writer thought, after some gracious manifestation of the Lord's hand on his behalf, that he could trust Him for the future; that the remembrance of His past goodness and mercy would keep him calm and confident when the next cloud should drapen his landscape. Alas! When it came how sadly he failed. Little did we know our treacherous heart. And little do we know it even now. O dear reader, each of us need the upholding hand of the Lord every step of our journey through this world that lieth in the Wicked one; and, should that hand be for a single moment withdrawn, we should sink like lead in the mighty waters. Ah! nothing but grace rescued us; nothing but grace can sustain us; nothing but grace can carry us safely through. Nothing, nothing but the distinguishing and almighty grace of a sovereign God!

“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?”  
(John 6:8, 9).

Unbelief is infectious. Like Philip before him, Andrew, too, seemed blind to the glory of Christ. “What are they among so many?” was the utterance of the same old evil heart of unbelief which long ago had asked, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Psalm 78:10). And how the helplessness of unbelief comes out here! “That every one may take a little,” said Philip; “What are these among so many?” asked Andrew. What mattered the “many” when the Son of God was there! Like Philip, Andrew calculated without Christ, and, therefore he saw only a hopeless situation. How often we look at God through our difficulties; or, rather, we try to, for the difficulties hide Him. Keep the eye on Him, and the difficulties will not be seen. But alas! what self-centered, skeptical, sinful creatures we are at best! God may lavish upon us the riches of His grace — He may have opened for us many a dry path through the waters of difficult circumstances — He may have delivered us with His outstretched arm in six troubles, yet, when the seventh comes along, instead of resting on Job 5:19, we are distrustful, full of doubts and fears, just as if we had never known Him. Such frail and depraved creatures are we that the faith we have this hour may yield to the most dishonoring distrust in the next.

This instance of the disciples’ unbelief is recorded for our “learning” — for our humbling and watchfulness. The same unbelief was evidenced by Israel in the wilderness, for the human heart is the same in all ages. All of God’s wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea were as nothing, when the trials of the wilderness came upon them. Their testings in “the wilderness of sin” (Exodus 16:1) only brought out of their hearts just what this testing brought out of Philip’s and Andrew’s, and just what similar testing brings out of ours — blindness and unbelief. The human heart, when proved, can yield nothing else, for nothing else is there. O with what fervency should we daily pray to our Father, “Lead us not into temptation [trial]”!

[“And Jesus said, Make the men sit down” \(John 6:10\).](#)

How thankful we should be that God’s blessings are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, and not according to the poverty of our faith. What would have happened to that multitude if Christ had acted according to the faith of His disciples? Why, the multitude would have gone away unfed! Ah! dear reader, God’s

blessings do come, despite all our undeserving. Christ never fails, though there is nothing but failure in us. His arm is never withdrawn for a moment, nor is His love chilled by our skepticism and ingratitude. To hear or read of this may encourage one who is merely a professing Christian to continue in his careless and God-dishonoring course; but far otherwise will it be with a *real* child of God. The realization of the Lord's unchanging goodness, His unfailing mercies despite our backslidings — will melt him to tears in godly sorrow.

“And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.” How patient was the Lord with His disciples. There was no harsh rebuke for either Philip or Andrew. The Lord knoweth our frame and remembers that we are dust. “Make the men sit down” was a further test; this time of their *obedience*. And a searching test it was. What was the use of making a hungry multitude sit down when there was nothing to feed them with? Ah! but God had spoken; Christ had given the command, and that was enough. When He commands it is for us to obey, not to reason and argue. Why must not Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge? Simply because God had forbidden them to. Why should Noah, in the absence of any sign of an approaching flood, go to all the trouble of building the ark? Simply because God had commanded him to. So, today. Why should the Christian be baptized? Why should the women keep silence in the churches? Simply because God has commanded these things — Acts 10:48; 1 Corinthians 14:34.

It is indeed blessed to note the response of the disciples to this command of their Master. Their faith had failed, but their obedience did not. Where both fail, there is grave reason to doubt if there is spiritual life dwelling in such a soul. Their obedience evidenced the genuineness of their Christianity. “If faith is weak, obedience is the best way in which it may be strengthened. “Then shall ye know,’ says the prophet, ‘if ye *follow* on to know the Lord.’ If you have not much light, walk up to the standard of what you have, and you are sure to have more. This will prove that you are a genuine servant of God. Well, this is what the disciples seemed to do here. The light of their faith was low, but they heard the word of Jesus, ‘Make the men sit down.’ They can act if they cannot see. They can obey His word

if they cannot see that all fulness dwells in Him to meet every difficulty. So they obey His command. The men sit down, and Jesus begins to dispense His blessings. And thus by their act of obedience, their faith becomes enlightened, and every want is supplied. This is always the result of walking up to the light we have got. 'To him that hath shall more be given.' That light may be feeble, it may be only a single ray irradiating the darkness of the mind; nevertheless, it is what God has given you. Despise it not. Hide it not. Walk up to it, and more shall be added.

“And we may notice here how all blessings come down to us through the channel of obedience. The supply for every want had been determined beforehand in the Savior’s mind, for ‘he himself knew what he would do’ (verse 6). Yet though this were so, it was to flow through this medium — so intimately and inseparably is the carrying out of all God’s purposes of grace toward us connected with obedience to His commands. This is the prominent feature in all God’s people. ‘*Obedient children*’ is the term by which they are distinguished from those who are of the world. ‘He became obedient’ was the distinguishing feature in the character of the divine Master, and it is the mark that the Holy Spirit sets upon all His servants. Obedience and blessing are inseparably connected in God’s Word. ‘If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.’ ‘He that hath my commandments and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved by my Father, and *I will love him and will manifest myself to him*’” (Dr. F. Whitfield)

“And Jesus said, Make the men to sit down.” But why “sit down”? Two answers may be returned. First, because God is a God of order. Any one who has studied the works of God knows that. So, too, with His Word. When His people left Egypt, they did not come forth like a disorderly mob; but in ranks of fives — see Exodus 13:18 margin. It was the same when they crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan — see Joshua 1:14 margin. It was so here. Mark says, “They sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties” (John 6:40). It is so still: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Whenever there is confusion in a religious meeting — two or more praying at the same time, etc. — it is a sure sign that the Holy Spirit

is not in control of it. “God *is not* the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

“Make the men sit down.” Why? Secondly, may we not also see in this word the illustration of an important principle pertaining to the spiritual life, namely, that we must sit down if we would be fed — true alike for sinner and saint. The activities of the flesh must come to an end if the Bread of life is to be received by us. How much all of us need to ask God to teach us to be quiet and sit still. Turn to and ponder Psalm 107:30; Isaiah 30:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Peter 3:4. In this crazy age, when almost everybody is rushing hither and thither, when the standard of excellency is not how well a thing is done, but how quickly, when the Lord’s people are thoroughly infected by the same spirit of haste, this is indeed a timely word. And let not the reader imagine that he has power of himself to comply. We have to be “*made*” to “sit down” — frequently by sickness. Note the same word in Psalm 23:2 — “He *maketh me to lie* down in green pastures.”

“Now there was much grass in the place” (John 6:10).

How gracious of the Holy Spirit to record this. Nothing, however trifling or insignificant, is unknown to God or beneath His notice. The “much cattle” in Nineveh (Jonah 4:11) had not been forgotten by Him. And how minutely has the Word of God recorded the house, the situation of it, and the name and occupation of one of the Lord’s disciples (Acts 10:5, 6)! Everything is before Him in the registry of heaven. God’s eye is upon every circumstance connected with our life. There is nothing too little for Him if it concerns His beloved child. God ordered nature to provide cushions for this hungry multitude to sit upon! Mark adds that the grass was “green” (John 6:39), which reminds us that we must rest in the “green pastures” of His Word if our souls are to be fed.

“So the men sat down, in number about five thousand” (John 6:10).

This is another beautiful line in the picture (cf. the five loaves in verse 9), for five is ever the number which speaks of grace, that is why it was the dominant numeral in the Tabernacle where God manifested His grace in the midst of Israel. Five is four (the number

of the creature) plus one — God. It is God adding His blessing and grace to the works of His hand.

“And Jesus took the loaves” (John 6:11).

He did not scorn the loaves because they were few in number, nor the fish either because they were “small.” How this tells us that God is pleased to use small and weak things! He used the tear of a babe to move the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter. He used the shepherd-rod of Moses to work mighty miracles in Egypt. He used David’s sling and stone to overthrow the Philistine giant. He used a “little maid” to bring the “mighty” Naaman to Elisha. He used a widow with a handful of meal to sustain His prophet. He used a “little child” to teach His disciples a much needed lesson in humility. So here, He used the five loaves and two small fishes to feed this great multitude. And, dear reader, perhaps He is ready to use you — weak, insignificant, and ignorant though you be — and make you “mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). But mark it carefully, it was only as these loaves and fishes were placed in the *hands of Christ* that they were made efficient and sufficient!

“And Jesus took the loaves.” He did not despise them and work independently of them. He did not rain manna from heaven, but used the means which were to hand. And surely this is another lesson that many of His people need to take to heart today. It is true that God is not limited to means, but frequently He employs them. When healing the bitter waters of Marah God used a tree (Exodus 15:23-25). In healing Hezekiah of his boil He employed a lump of figs (2 Kings 20:4-7). Timothy was exhorted to use a “little wine for his stomach’s sake and his often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23). In view of such scriptures let us, then, beware of going to the fanatical lengths of some who scorn all use of drugs and herbs when sick.

“And when he had given thanks” (John 6:11).

In all things Christ has left us a perfect example. He here teaches us to acknowledge God as the Giver of every good gift, and to own Him as the One who provides for the wants of all His creatures. This is the least that we can do. To fail at this point is the basest ingratitude.

“He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down” (John 6:11).

Here we are taught, again, the same lesson as the first miracle supplied, namely, that God is pleased to use human instruments in accomplishing the counsels of His grace, and thus give us the inestimable honor and privilege of being “laborers together with God” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Christ fed the hungry multitude through His disciples. It was their work as truly as it was His. His was the increase, but theirs was the distribution. God acts according to the same principle today. Between the unsearchable riches of Christ and the hungry multitudes there is room for consecrated service and ministry. Nor should this be regarded as exclusively the work of pastors and evangelists. It is the happy duty of every child of God to pass on to others that which the Lord in His grace has first given to them. Yea, this is one of the conditions of receiving more for ourselves. This is one of the things that Paul reminded the Hebrews of. He declared he had many things to say unto them, and they were hard to be interpreted because they had become dull (slothful is the meaning of the word) of hearing, and unskilled in using the Word. Consequently, instead of teaching others — as they ought — they needed to be taught again themselves (Hebrews 5:11- 13). The same truth comes out in that enigmatical utterance of our Lord recorded in Luke 8:18: “for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” The one who “hath” is the believer who makes good use of what he has received, and in consequence more is given him; the one who “seemeth to have” is the man who hides his light under a bushel, who makes not good use of what he received, and from him this is “taken away.” Be warned then, dear reader. If we do not use to God’s glory what He has given us, He may withhold further blessings from us, and take away that which we fail to make good use of.

“He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down.” One can well imagine the mingled feelings of doubt and skepticism as the twelve left the Savior’s side for the hungry multitude, with the little store in their baskets. How doubt must have given place to amazement, and awe to adoration, as they distributed,

returned to their Master for a fresh supply, and continued distributing, giving a portion of bread and fish to each till all were satisfied, and more remaining at the close than at the beginning! Let us remember that Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and today and for ever,” and that all fulness dwells in Him. By comparing Mark 6:41 it will be found that there the Holy Spirit has described the *modus operandi* of the miracle:

“He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and *brake* the loaves, and *gave* to his disciples.” The word “brake” is in the aorist tense, intimating an instantaneous act; whereas “gave” is in the imperfect tense, denoting the continuous action of giving. “This shows that the miraculous power was in the hands of Christ, between the breaking and the giving” (Companion Bible).

He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down.” What a lesson is there here for the Christian servant. The apostles first received the bread from the hands of their Master, and then “distributed” to the multitude. It was not their hands which made the loaves increase, but His! He provided the abundant supply, and their business was to humbly receive and faithfully distribute. In like manner, it is not the business of the preacher to make men value or receive the Bread of life. *He* can not make it soul-saving to any one. This is not his work; for this he is not responsible. It is God who giveth the “increase”! Nor is it the work of the preacher to *create* something new and novel. His duty is to *seek* “bread” at the hands of his Lord, and then set it before the people. What they do with the Bread is their responsibility! But, remember, that we cannot give out to others, except we have first received ourselves. It is only the full vessel that overflows!

“And likewise of the fishes as much as they would” (John 6:11).

“Precious, precious words! The supply stopped only with the demand. So, when Abraham went up to intercede with God on behalf of the righteous in Sodom, the Lord never ceased granting till Abraham had ceased asking. Thus also in the case of Elisha’s oil; so long as there were empty vessels to be found in the land, it ceased not its abundant supply (2 Kings 4:6). Likewise also here, so long as there was a single one to supply, that supply came forth from the

treasuries of the Lord Jesus. The stream flowed on in rich abundance till all were filled. This is grace. This is what Jesus does to all His people. He comes to the poor bankrupt believer, and, placing in His hand a draft on the resources of heaven, says to him, 'Write on it what thou wilt.' Such is our precious Lord still. If we are straitened, it is not in Him, but in ourselves. If we are poor and weak, or tried and tempted, it is not that we cannot help ourselves — it is because we do not ('All things *are* yours', in Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:22 A.W.P.). We have so little faith in things unseen and eternal. We draw so little on the resources of Christ. We come not to Him with our spiritual wants — our empty vessels — and draw from the ocean fulness of His grace.

“As much as they would’. Precious, precious words. Remember them, doubting, hesitating one, in all thy petitions for faith at the throne of grace. ‘As much as they would.’ Remember them, tried and tempted one, in all thy pleadings for strength to support thee on thy wilderness way. ‘As much as they would’. Remember them, bereaved and desolate one, whose eyes are red with weeping, bending over the green sod, beneath which all thy earthly hopes are lying, and with a rent in thine heart that shall never be healed till the morning of resurrection — remember these words as thy wounded and desolate spirit breaks forth in mournful accents on a Savior’s ear for help and strength. And, guilty one, bowed down with a lifetimes load of sin, traversing the crooked bypaths of the broad road to ruin; a wilful wanderer from thy God; as the arrow of conviction penetrates thy soul, and as thine agonizing voice is heard crying for mercy — remember these precious, precious words, ‘as much as they would’. ‘Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out!’ (Dr. F. Whitfield).

[“When they were filled” \(John 6:12\).](#)

God gives with no niggardly hand. “When they were filled” — what a contrast is this from the words of Philip, “That every one of them may take a little”? The one was the outpouring of Divine grace, the other the limitation of unbelief. Christ had fed them from His own inexhaustible resources, and when He feeds His people He leaves no want behind. Christ, and He alone, satisfies. His promise is, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall

never thirst” (John 6:35). Do you know, dear reader, what it is to be “filled” from His blessed hand-filled with peace, filled with joy, filled with the Holy Spirit!

“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost”  
(John 6:12)

All were filled and yet abundance remained! How wonderful and how blessed this is. All fulness dwells in Christ, and that fulness is exhaustless. Countless sinners have been saved and their souls satisfied, and yet the riches of grace are as undiminished as ever. Then, too, this verse may be considered from another angle. “Gather up the fragments.” There was abundance for all, but the Lord would have no waste. How this rebukes the wicked extravagance that we now behold on every hand! Here, too, the Holy One has left us a perfect example. “Gather up the fragments” is a word that comes to us all. The “fragments” we need to watch most are the fragments of our time. How often these are wasted! “Let nothing be lost”! “Gather them up” — your mis-spent moments, your tardy services, your sluggish energies, your cold affections, your neglected duties. Gather them up and use them for His glory.

“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” (John 6:13).

How this confirms what we have said about giving out to others. The loaves were augmented by division and multiplied by subtraction! We are never impoverished, but always enriched by giving to others. It is the *liberal* soul that is made fat (Proverbs 11:25). We need never be anxious that there will not be enough left for our own needs. God never allows a generous giver to be the loser. It is miserliness which impoverishes. The disciples had more left at the finish than they had at the beginning! They “filled twelve baskets,” thus the twelve apostles were also provided with an ample supply for their own use too! They were the ones who were enriched by ministering to the hungry multitude! What a blessed encouragement to God’s servants today!

In closing, let us call attention to another of the wonderful typical and dispensational pictures which abound in this Gospel. The passage which has been before us supplies a lovely view of the activities of God during this dispensation. It should be carefully noted that John 6 opens with the words, “After these things.” This expression always points to the beginning of a new series — cf. John 5:1; 7:1; 21:1; Revelation 4:1, etc. In John 4 we have two typical chapters which respect *the Gentiles* — see the closing portions of chapters 15 and 16. Hence John 5 *begins* with “After this.” John 5 supplies us with a typical picture of Israel — see chapter 17. Now as John 6 opens with “After these things,” we are led to expect that the dispensational view it first supplies will respect *the Gentiles* again and not the Jews. This is confirmed by the fact that the remainder of the verse intimates that Christ had now left Judea and had once more entered Galilee of the Gentiles. Further corroboration is found in that Philip and Andrew figure so prominently in the incident which follows — cf. John 12:20-22 which specially links *them* with the *Gentiles*. In the remainder of the passage we have a beautiful view of Christ and His people during the present dispensation. Note the following lines in the picture: —

**First**, we behold the Lord *on high* and His people “seated” with Him (John 4:3). This, of course, typifies our standing; what follows contemplates our state.

**Second**, we are shown the basis of our blessings: “And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh” (verse 4). The Passover speaks of “Christ our passover sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). But note, it is not only “the passover” which is mentioned here, but also “the passover, a feast” (note the absence of this in John 2:13!), which beautifully accords with what follows — typically, believers feeding on Christ! But we are also told here that this “passover” was “a feast of the Jews.” This is parallel with John 4:22 — “Salvation is of the Jews.” It is a word to humble us, showing our indebtedness to Israel, cf. Romans 11:18: “Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.”

**Third**, the people of God, those who in this dispensation are fed, are they who “come unto Him” (verse 5) — Christ.

**Fourth**, Christ's desire (verse 5) and purpose (verse 6) to feed His own.

**Fifth**, His saints are a people of little faith (cf. Matthew 8:26), who fail in the hour of testing (verses 5-9).

**Sixth**, His people must "sit down" in order to be "fed."

**Seventh**, Christ ministers to His people in sovereign grace ("five loaves" and "five" thousand men, (verses 10, 11) and gives them a satisfying portion — "They were *filled*" (verse 12).

It is beautiful to observe that *after* the great multitude had been fed, there "remained" *twelve* full baskets, which tells of the abundance of grace reserved for *Israel*. This also gives meaning to, "A feast of the Jews *was nigh*" (verse 4).

Let the following questions be studied with a view to the next chapter: —

1. Why did Christ "depart"? verse 15.
2. Why were the disciples "afraid"? verse 19.
3. What spiritual lessons may be drawn from verses 17 to 21?
4. How harmonize the first half of verse 27 with Ephesians 2:8, 9?
5. What is meant by Christ being "sealed"? verse 27.

# JOHN 6:14-27

## CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA

We begin with our customary Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. The Response of the people to the miracle of the loaves: verses 14, 15.
2. The Retirement of Christ to the mount: verse 15.
3. The Disciples in the storm: verses 16-19.
4. The Coming of Christ to them: verses 20, 21.
5. The people follow Christ to Capernaum: verses 22-25.
6. Christ exposes their motive: verse 26.
7. Christ presses their spiritual need upon them: verse 27.

The opening verses of the passage before us contain the sequel to what is described in the first thirteen verses of John 6. There we read of the Lord ministering, in wondrous grace, to a great multitude of hungry people. They had no real appreciation of His blessed person, but had been attracted by idle curiosity and the love of the sensational — “because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased” (verse 2). Nevertheless, the Son of God, in tenderest pity, had supplied their need by means of the loaves and the fishes. What effects, then, did this have upon them?

Christ had manifested His Divine power. There was no gainsaying that. The crowd were impressed, for we are told,

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world” (John 6:14).

The title “that prophet” has already been before us in John 1:21. The reference is to Deuteronomy 18:15, where we read that, through Moses God declared, “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.” These men, then, seemed ready to receive the Lord as their Messiah. And yet how little they realized and recognized what was due Him as “that prophet” — the Son of God

incarnate. Instead of falling down before Him as undone sinners, crying for mercy; instead of prostrating themselves at His feet, in reverent worship; instead of owning Him as the Blessed One, worthy of their hearts' adoration, they would "take him by force to make him a king" (John 6:15); and this, no doubt, for their own ends, thinking that He would lead them in a successful revolt against the hated Romans. How empty, then, were their words! How little were their consciences searched or their hearts exercised! How blind they still were to the Light! Had their hearts been opened, the light had shone in, revealing their wretchedness; and then, they would have taken their place as lost and needy sinners. It is the same today.

Many there are who regard our Lord as a Prophet (a wonderful Teacher), who have never seen their need of Him as a Refuge from the wrath to come — a doom they so thoroughly deserve. Let us not be misled, then, by this seeming honoring of Christ by those who eulogize His precepts, but who despise His Cross. It is no more a proof that they are saved who, today, own Christ as a greater than Buddha or Mohammed, than this declaration by these men of old — "This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world," evidenced that they had "passed from death unto life."

["When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force" \(John 6:15\).](#)

This is very solemn. Christ was not deceived by their fair speech. Their words sounded very commendable and laudatory, no doubt, but the Christ of God was, and is, the Reader of hearts. He knew what lay behind their words. He discerned the spirit that prompted them. "Jesus therefore perceived" is parallel with John 2:24, 25:

["But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."](#)

"Jesus therefore perceived" is a word that brings before us His Deity. The remainder of verse 15 is profoundly significant and suggestive.

“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” (John 6:15).

These Jews had owned Him (with their lips) as *Prophet*, and they were ready to crown Him as their King, but there is another office that comes in between these. Christ could not be their *King* until He had first officiated as *Priest*, offering Himself as a Sacrifice for sin! Hence the doctrinal significance of “He departed again into a mountain himself *alone*,” for in His priestly work He is unattended — cf. Leviticus 16:17!

But there was also a moral and dispensational reason why Christ “departed” when these Jews would use force to make Him a King. He needed not to be *made* “a king,” for He was born such (Matthew 2:2); nor would He receive the kingdom at their hand. This has been brought out beautifully by Mr. J. B. Bellet in his notes on John’s Gospel: —

“The Lord would not take the kingdom from zeal like this. This could not be the source of the kingdom of the Son of Man. The ‘beasts’ may take their kingdoms from the winds striving upon the great sea, but Jesus cannot (Daniel 7:2, 25). This was not, in His ear, the shouting of the people bringing in the headstone of the corner (Zechariah 4:7); nor the symbol of His People made willing in the day of His power (Psalm 110:3). This would have been an appointment to the throne of Israel on scarcely better principles than those on which Saul had been appointed of old. His kingdom would have been the fruit of their revolted heart. But that could not be. And besides this, ere the Lord could take His seat on Mount Zion, He must ascend the solitary mount; and ere the people could enter the kingdom, they must go down to the stormy sea. And these things we see reflected here as in a glass.”

It should be noted that Matthew tells us how Christ “went up into a mountain apart *to pray*” (Matthew 14:23); so, too, Mark (Mark 6:46). The absence of this word in John is in beautiful accord with the character and theme of this fourth Gospel, and supplies us with another of those countless proofs for the Divine and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. In this Gospel we never see Christ praying (John 17 is *intercession*, giving us a sample of His priestly

ministry on our behalf in heaven: note particularly verses 4 and 5, which indicate that the intercession recorded in the verses that follow was *anticipatory* of Christ's return to the Father!), for John's special design is to exhibit the *Divine* glories of the Savior.

“And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship” (John 6:16, 17).

Matthew explains the reason for this:

“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away” (Matthew 14:22).

The Lord desired to be alone, so He caused the disciples to go on ahead of Him. It would seem, too, that He purposed to teach them another lesson on faith. This will appear in the sequel.

“And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them” (John 6:17).

What we have here, and in the verses that follow, speaks unmistakably to us. It describes the conditions through which we must pass as we journey to our Home above. Though not of the world, we are necessarily in it: that world made up of the wicked, who are like “the troubled sea.” The world in which we live, dear reader, is the world that rejected and still rejects the Christ of God. It is the world which “lieth in the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), the friendship of which is enmity with God (James 4:4). It is a world devoid of spiritual light; a world over which hangs the shadow of death. Peter declares the world is “a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). It is dark because “the light of the world” is absent.

“It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.” Sometimes Christ withholds the light of His countenance even from His own. Job cried, “when I waited for light, there came darkness” (Job 30:26). But, thank God, it is recorded, “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness” (Psalm 112:4). Let us remember that the darkness is not created by Satan, but by God (Isaiah 45:7). And He has a wise and good reason for it. Sometimes He withholds the

light from His people that they may discover “the *treasures* of darkness” (Isaiah 45:3).

“Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of the great wind that blew” (John 6:17, 18). This tested the faith and patience of the disciples. The longer they waited the worse things became. It looked as though Christ was neglectful of them. It seemed as though He had forgotten to be gracious. Perhaps they were saying, If the Master had been here, this storm would not have come up. Had He been with them, even though asleep on a pillow, His presence would have cheered them. But He was not there; and the darkness was about them, and the angry waves all around them — fit emblems of the opposition of the world against the believer’s course. It was a real test of their faith and patience.

And similarly does God often test us today. Frequently our circumstances are dark, and conditions are all against us. We cry to the Lord, but He “does not come.” But let us remind ourselves, that God is never in a hurry. However much the petulance of unbelief may seek to hasten His hand, He waits His own good time. *Omnipotence* can afford to wait, for it is always sure of success. And because omnipotence is combined with infinite wisdom and love, we may be certain that God not only does everything in the right way, but also at the best time:

“And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

Sometimes the Lord “waits” until it is eventide before He appears in His delivering grace and power. The darkness becomes more gloomy, and still He waits. Yes, but He waits “to be gracious.” But why? Could He not be gracious without this waiting, and the painful suspense such waiting usually brings to us? Surely; but one reason for the delay is, that *His* hand may be the more evident; and another reason is, that *His* hand may be the more appreciated, when He does intervene. Some times the darkness becomes even more gloomy, well-nigh unbearable; and still He waits. And again, we wonder, Why? All is it not that all our hopes may be disappointed; that our plans may be frustrated, till we reach our wit’s *end* (Psalm 107:27)!

And, then, just as we had given up hope, He breaks forth unexpectedly, and we are startled, as were these disciples on the stormlashed sea.

“So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea” (John 6:19).

These lines will, doubtless, be read by more than one saint who is in a tight place. For you, too, the night is fearfully dark, and the breakers of adverse circumstances look as though they would completely swamp you. O tried and troubled one, read the blessed sequel of John 6:17, 18. It contains a word of cheer for *you*, if your *faith* lays hold of it. Notice that the disciples did not give up in despair — they continued “rowing” (verse 19)! And ultimately the Lord came to their side and delivered them from the angry tempest. So, dear saint, whatever may be the path appointed by the Lord, however difficult and distasteful, *continue therein*, and in His own good time the Lord will deliver you. Again we say, Notice that the disciples continued their “rowing.” It was all they could do, and it was all that was required of them. In a little while the Lord appeared, and they were at the land. Oh may God grant both writer and reader perseverance in the path of duty. Tempted and discouraged one, remember Isaiah 30:18 (look it up and memorize it) and *continue rowing!*

There is another thing, a blessed truth, which is well calculated to sustain us in the interval *before* the deliverance comes; and it will if the heart appropriates its blessedness. While the storm-tossed disciples were pulling at the oars and making little or no progress, the Lord was on high — not below, but above them — master of the situation. And, as Matthew tells us, He was “praying.” And on high He is now thus engaged on our behalf. Remember this, O troubled one, your great High Priest who is “touched with the feeling of your infirmities” is above, ever living to intercede. His prayers undergird you, so that you cannot sink. Mark adds a word that is even more precious — “And he saw them toiling in rowing” (John 6:48). Christ was not indifferent to their peril. His eye was upon them. And even though it was “dark” (John 6:17) He saw them. No darkness could hide those disciples from Him. And this, too, speaks to us. We may be “toiling in rowing” (the Greek word means “fatigued”), weary of

the buffeting from the unfriendly winds and waves, but there is One above who is not unconcerned, who sees and knows our painful lot, and who, even now, is preparing to come to our side. Turn your eyes away from your frail barque, away from the surrounding tempest, and “look off unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith” (Hebrews 12:1).

“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” (John 6:19).

This shows how little faith was in exercise. Matthew tells us, “And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled” (Matthew 14:26). Think of it, “troubled” and “afraid” of Jesus! Does some one say, That was because the night was dark and the waves boisterous, consequently it was easy to mistake the Savior for an apparition? Moreover, the sight they beheld was altogether unprecedented: never before had they seen one walking on the water! But if we turn to Mark’s record we shall find that it was not dimness of physical sight which caused the disciples to mistake their Master for a spectre, but dullness of spiritual vision: “They considered not the miracle of the loaves: for *their heart* was *hardened*.” Their fears had mastered them. They were not expecting deliverance. They had already forgotten that exercise of Divine grace and power which they had witnessed only a few short hours before. And how accurately (and tragically) do they portray us — so quickly do we forget the Lord’s mercies and deliverances in the past, so little do we really expect Him to answer our prayers of the present.

“But he saith unto them, “It is I; be not afraid” (John 6:20). This is parallel in thought with what we had before us in verse 10. The scepticism of Philip and the unbelief of Andrew did not prevent the outflow of Divine mercy. So here, even the hardness of heart of these disciples did not quench their Lord’s love for them. O how deeply thankful we ought to be that

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10).

From beginning to end He deals with us in wondrous, fathomless, sovereign grace. “It is I,” He says. He first directs their gaze to Himself. “Be not afraid,” was a word to calm their hearts. And this is His unchanging order. Our fears can only be dispelled by looking in faith to and having our hearts occupied with Him. Look around, and we shall be disheartened. Look within, and we shall be discouraged. But look unto Him, and our fears will vanish.

“Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went” (John 6:21).

Now that He had revealed Himself to them; now that He had graciously uttered the heart-calming “Be not afraid”; now that He had (as Matthew and Mark tell us) spoken that well-known word “Be of good cheer”: they “willingly” received him into the ship.” Christ does not force Himself upon us: He waits to be “received.” It is the welcome of our hearts that He desires. And is it not just because this is so often withheld, that He is so slow in coming to our relief — *i.e.* “manifesting himself” to us (John 14:21)! How blessed to note that as soon as *He* entered the ship, the end of the voyage was reached for them. In applying to ourselves the second half of this twenty-first verse, we must not understand it to signify that when Christ has “manifested” Himself unto us that the winds will cease to blow or that the adverse “sea” will now befriend us; far from it. But it means that the heart will now have found a Haven of rest: our fears will be quieted; we shall be occupied not with the tempest, but with the Master of it. Such are some of the precious spiritual lessons which we may take to ourselves from this passage.

“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; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus” (John 6:22-24).

The multitude, whose hearts were set on making the Miracle-worker their “king,” apparently collected early in the morning to carry their purpose into effect. But on seeking for Jesus, He was nowhere to be found. This must have perplexed them. They knew that on the previous evening there was only one boat on their side of the sea, and they had seen the disciples depart in this, alone. Where, then, was the Master? Evidently, He who had miraculously multiplied five loaves and two fishes so as to constitute an abundant meal for more than five thousand people, must also in some miraculous manner have transported Himself across the sea. So, availing themselves of the boats which had just arrived from Tiberias, they crossed over to Capernaum, in the hope of finding the Lord Jesus there; for they knew that this city had, for some time, been His chief place of residence. Nor was their expectation disappointed.

“And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not **because ye saw the miracles but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled**” (John 6:25, 26).

There was, perhaps, nothing wrong in their question, “Rabbi, when camest thou hither?” But to have answered it would not have profited them, and that was what the Lord sought. He, therefore, at once showed them that He was acquainted with their motives, and knew full well what had brought them thither. Outwardly at least, these people appeared ready to honor Him. They had followed Him across the sea of Galilee, and sought Him out again. But He read their hearts. He knew the inward springs of their conduct, and was not to be deceived. It was the Son of God evidencing His Deity again. He knew it was temporal, not spiritual blessing, that they sought. When He tells them, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles (or “signs”) but because ye did eat of the loaves,” His evident meaning is that they realized not the spiritual significance of those “signs.” Had they done so, they would have prostrated themselves before Him in worship. And let us remember that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Christ still reads the human heart. No secrets can be withheld from Him. He knows why different ones put on religious garments when it suits their purpose — why, at times, some are so loud in their religious

pretensions — why thy profess to be Christians. Hypocrisy is very sinful, but its folly and uselessness are equally great.

“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” (John 6:27).

The expression used here by Christ is a relative and comparative one: His meaning is, Labor for the latter rather than for the former. The word “labor” is very expressive. It signifies that men should be in deadly earnest over spiritual things; that they should spare no pains to obtain that which their souls so imperatively need. It is used figuratively, and signifies making salvation the object of intense desire. O that men would give the same diligence to secure that which is imperative, as they put forth to gain the things of time and sense. That to which Christ bids men direct their thoughts and energies is “meat which endureth” — *abideth* would be better: it is one of the characteristic words of this Gospel.

When our Lord says, “Labor... for that meat (satisfying portion) which endureth unto everlasting life,” He was not inculcating salvation by works. This is very clear from His next words — “which the Son of man shall give unto you.” But He was affirming that which needs to be pressed on the half-hearted and those who are occupied with material things. It is difficult to preserve the balance of truth. On the one hand, we are so anxious to insist that salvation is by grace alone, that we are in danger of failing to uphold the sinner’s responsibility to seek the Lord with all his heart. Again; in pressing the total depravity of the natural man, his *deadness* in trespasses and sins, we are apt to neglect our duty of calling on him to repent and believe the Gospel. This word of Christ’s, “Labor... for the meat which endureth” is parallel (in substance) with “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” (Luke 13:24), and “every one presseth into the kingdom of God” (Luke 16:16). “For him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27). What is meant by Christ being “sealed” by God the Father? First, notice it is as “Son of man” that He is here said to be “sealed.” That is, it was as the Son of God, but incarnate. There are two prime thoughts connected with “sealing:” identification, and attestation or ratification. In Revelation 7 we read of God’s angel “sealing” twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel. The

sealing there consists of placing a mark on their foreheads, and it is for the purpose of identification: to distinguish and separate them from the mass of apostate Israel. Again, in Esther 8:8 we read, "Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and *sealed* with the king's ring, *may no man reverse.*" Here the thought is entirely different. The king's "seal" there speaks of authority. His seal was added for the purpose of confirmation and ratification. These, we doubt not, are the principle thoughts we are to associate with the "sealing" of Christ.

The historical reference is to the time when Christ was baptized — Acts 10:38. When the Lord Jesus, in marvellous condescension, had identified Himself with the believing remnant in Israel, taking His place in that which spoke of death, the Father there singled Him out by "anointing" or "sealing" Him with the Holy Spirit. This was accompanied by His audible voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus was the Christ, now about to enter upon His mediatorial work, publicly identified and accredited by God. The Father testified to the perfections of His incarnate Son, and communicated official authority, by "sealing" Him with the Holy Spirit. This declaration of Christ here in verse 27 anticipated the question or challenge which we find in verse 52, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The sufficient answer, already given, was "for him hath God the Father sealed." So, too, it anticipated and answered the question of verse 30: "What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee?" Just as princes of the realm are often authorized by the king to act in governmental and diplomatic affairs on his behalf, and carry credentials that bear the king's seal to confirm their authority before those to whom they are sent, so Christ gave proof of His heavenly authority by His miracles: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost *and with power*" (Acts 10:38).

It is blessed to know that we, too, have been "sealed": Ephesians 1:13. Believers are "sealed" as those who are *approved* of God. But observe, carefully, that it is *in Christ* we are thus distinguished. "*In whom* also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Christ was "sealed" because of His own intrinsic perfections; we, because of our identification and union with Him!

“Accepted *in the beloved*” (Ephesians 1:6) gives us the same thought. Mark, though, it is not said (as commonly misunderstood) that the Holy Spirit *seals* us, but that the Holy Spirit Himself is God’s “Seal” upon us — the distinguishing sign of identification, for sinners do not have the Holy Spirit (Jude 19).

Let the student ponder the following questions, preparatory to our next chapter: —

1. What does the question in verse 28 intimate?
2. What is the meaning of verse 29?
3. What do verses 30 and 31 demonstrate in connection with those people?
4. In how many different respects is “bread” a suited emblem of Christ?
5. What is the meaning of verse 35 — Does a believer ever “hunger” or “thirst”?
6. Who have been given to Christ by the Father? verse 37.
7. What comforting truth is found in verse 39?

# JOHN 6:28-40

## CHRIST, THE BREAD OF LIFE

Below we give an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

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1. The Inquiry of the legalistic heart: verse 28.
2. The Divine answer thereto: verse 29.
3. The Scepticism of the natural heart: verses 30, 31.
4. Christ the true Bread: verses 32-34.
5. Christ the Satisfier of man's heart: verse 35.
6. The Unbelief of those who had seen: verse 36.
7. Christ's Submission to the Father's will: verses 37-40.

It is both important and instructive to observe the connection between John 5 and John 6: the latter is, doctrinally, the sequel to the former. There is both a comparison and a contrast in the way Christ is presented to us in these two chapters. In both we see Him as the Source of life, Divine life, spiritual life, eternal life. But, speaking of what is characteristic in John 5, we have life *communicated* by Christ, whereas in John 6 we have salvation *received* by us. Let us amplify this a little.

John 5 opens with a typical illustration of Christ imparting life to an impotent soul: a man, helpless through an infirmity which he had had for thirty-eight years, is made whole. This miracle Christ makes the basis of a discourse in which He presented His Divine glories. In verse 21 we read, "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them: even so the Son *quickeneth* whom he will." The same line of thought continues through to the end of verse 26. Thus, Christ there presents Himself in full Godhead title, as the Source and Dispenser of life, sovereignly imparted to whom He pleases. The one upon whom this Divine life is bestowed, as illustrated by the case of the impotent man, is regarded as entirely *passive*; he is called into life by the all-mighty, creating voice of the Son of God (verse 25).

There is nothing in the sinner's case but the powerlessness of death until the deep silence is broken by the word of the Divine Quickener. His voice makes itself heard in the soul, hitherto dead, but no longer dead as it hears His voice. But nothing is said of any searchings of heart, any exercises of conscience, any sense of need, any felt desire after Christ. It is simply Christ, in Divine sufficiency, speaking to spiritually dead souls, empowering them (by sovereign "quickening") to hear.

In John 6 Christ is presented in quite another character, and in keeping with this, so is the sinner too. Here our Lord is viewed not in His essential glories, but as the Son incarnate. Here He is contemplated as "the Son of man" (verses 27, 53), and therefore, as in the place of humiliation, "come down from heaven" (verses 33, 38, 51, etc.). As such, Christ is made known as the Object of desire, and as the One who can meet the sinner's need. In John 5 it was Christ who *sought out* the "great multitude" of impotent folk (verses 3, 6), and when Christ presented Himself to the man who had an infirmity thirty and eight years, he evidenced no desire for the Savior. He acted as one who had no heart whatever for the Son of God. As such he accurately portrayed the dead soul when it is first quickened by Christ. But in John 6 the contrast is very noticeable. Here the "great multitude" *followed him* (verses 2, 24, 25), with an evident desire for Him we speak not now of the unworthy motive that prompted that desire, but the desire itself as illustrative of a truth. It is this contrast which indicates the importance of noting the relation of John 5 and 6. As said in our opening sentences, the latter is the sequel to the former. We mean that the order in the contents of the two chapters, so far as their contents are typical and illustrative, set forth the doctrinal order of truth. They give us the two sides: the Divine and the human; and here, as ever, the Divine comes first. In John 5 we have the quickening power of Christ, as exercised according to His sovereign prerogative; in John 6 we have illustrated the *effects* of this in a soul already quickened. In the one, Christ approaches the dead soul; in the other, the dead soul, now quickened, seeks Christ!

In developing this illustration of the truth in John 6, the Holy Spirit has followed the same order as in John 5. Here, too, Christ works a miracle, on those who typically portray the doctrinal characters

which are in view. These are sinners already “quickenened,” but not yet saved; for, unlike quickening, there is a human side to salvation, as well as a Divine. The prominent thing brought before us in the first section of John 6 is a hungry multitude. And how forcibly and how accurately they illustrate the condition of a soul just quickened, is obvious. As soon as the Divine life has been imparted, there is a stirring within; there is a sense of need awakened. It is the life turning toward its Source, just as water ever seeks its own level. The illustration is Divinely apt, for there are few things of which we are more conscious than when we are assailed by the pangs of hunger. But not so with a dead man, for he is unconscious; or with a paralyzed man, for he is incapable of feeling. So it is spiritually. The one who is dead in trespasses and sins, and paralyzed by depravity, has no hunger for God. But how different with one who has been Divinely “quickenened”! The first effect of quickening is that the one quickened awakes to consciousness: the Divine life within gives capacity to discern his sinfulness and his need of Christ.

Mark, too, what follows in the second section of John 6. The same line of truth is pursued further. Here we see the disciples in darkness, in the midst of a storm, rowing towards the Place of Consolation. What a vivid illustration does this supply of the experiences of the newly quickened and so awakened soul! It tells of the painful experiences through which he passes ere the Haven of Rest is reached. Not yet is he really saved; not yet does he understand the workings of Divine grace within him. All he is conscious of is his sense of deep need. And it is then that Satan’s fiendish onslaughts are usually the fiercest. Into what a storm is he now plunged! But the Devil is not permitted to completely overwhelm the soul, any more than he was the disciples in the illustration. When God’s appointed time arrives, Christ draws nigh and says, “I am: be not afraid.” He stands revealed before the one who was seeking Him, and then is He “willingly received into the ship” — He is gladly embraced by faith, and received into the heart! Then the storm is over, the desired haven is reached, for the next thing we see is Christ and the disciples at “Capernaum” (place of consolation). Thus, in the feeding of the *hungry* multitude, and in the delivering of the disciples from the *storm-tossed* sea, we have a most blessed and wonderful illustration of Christ meeting and satisfying the conscious need of the soul previously quickened.

It will thus be seen that all of this is but introductory to the great theme unfolded in the middle section of John 6. Just as the healing of the impotent man at the beginning of John 5 introduced and prepared the way for the discourse that followed, so it is in John 6. Here the prominent truth is Christ in the place of humiliation, which He had voluntarily entered as man, “come down from heaven”; and thus as “the bread of life” presenting Himself as the Object who alone can supply the need of which the quickened and awakened soul is so conscious. [E](#)

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” (John 6:28).

This question appears to be the language of men temporarily impressed and aroused, but still in the dark concerning the way to Heaven. They felt, perhaps, that they were on the wrong road, that something was required of them, but what that something was they knew not. They supposed they had to do some work; but what works they were ignorant. It was the old self-righteousness of the natural man, who is ever occupied with his own doings. The carnal mind is flattered when it is consciously doing something for God. For his doings man deems himself entitled to reward. He imagines that salvation is due him, because he has earned it. Thus does he reckon the reward “not of grace, but of debt.” Man seeks to bring God into the humbling position of debtor to him. How unbelief and pride degrade the Almighty! How they rob Him of His glory!

“What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” It seems almost incredible that these men should have asked such a question. Only a moment before, Christ had said to them

“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” (verse 27).

But the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, is unable to rise to the thought of a gift. Or, rather, the carnal heart is unwilling to come down to the place of a beggar and a pauper, and receive everything for nothing. The sinner wants to do something to earn it. It was thus with the woman at the well: until Divine grace

completed its work within her, she knew not the “gift of God” (John 4:10). It was the same with the rich young ruler: “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18). It was the same with the stricken Jews on the day of Pentecost: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). It was the same with the Philippian jailer: “Sirs, what must I do to be “ saved? (Acts 16:30). So it was with the prodigal son — “Make me as one of thy *hired servants*” (one who works for what he receives) was his thought (Luke 15:19). Ah! dear friends, God and man are ever the same wherever you find them!

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29).

In what lovely patient grace did the Lord make reply! In blessed simplicity of language, He stated that the one thing that God requires of sinners is that they believe on the One whom He has sent into the world to meet their deepest need. “This is the work of God” means, this is what God requires. It is not the works of the law, nor the bringing of an offering to His temple altar; but faith in Christ. Christ is the Savior appointed by God, and *faith in Him* is that which God approves, and without which nothing else can be acceptable in His sight. Paul answered the question of the Philippian jailer as the Lord before him had done — “What must I do to be saved?”: “*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” was the reply (Acts 16:31). But again we say, Man had rather do than “believe.” And why is this? Because it panders to his pride: because it repudiates his utter ruin, inasmuch as it is a denial that he is “without strength” (Romans 5:6): because it provides for him a platform on which he can boast and glory. Nevertheless, the one and only “work” which God will accept is faith in His Son.

But, perhaps some one will raise the question, Is it possible that I can ever enter heaven without good works? Answer: No; you cannot enter heaven without a good character. But those good works and that character of yours must be without a flaw. They must be as holy as God, or you can never enter His presence. But how may I secure such a character as that? Surely that is utterly impossible! No, it is not. But how then? By a series of *strivings* after holiness? No; that is doing again. Do nothing. Only believe. Accept the Work already

done — the finished work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf. This is what God asks of you — give up your own doings and receive that of My beloved Son. But are you ready to do this? Are you willing to abandon your own doings, your own righteousness, and to accept His? You will not till you are thoroughly convinced that all your doings are faulty, that all your efforts fall far short of God's demands, that all your own righteousness is tarnished with sin, yea, is as "filthy rags." What man will renounce his own work in order to trust to that of another, unless he be first convinced that his own is worthless? What man will repose for safety in another till he be convinced that there is no safety in trusting to himself? It is impossible. Man cannot do this of himself: it takes the work of God." It is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and that alone, which brings the sinner to *renounce* his own works and lay hold on the Lord Jesus for salvation.

O dear reader, we would solemnly press this upon you. Is the finished work of Christ the *only* rock on which your soul is resting for eternal life, or are you still secretly trusting to your own doings for salvation? If so, you will be eternally lost, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it — "He that believeth not shall be damned." Your own doings, even if they were such as you wish them to be, could never save you. Your prayers, your tears, your sorrowings for sin, your alms-givings, your church-goings, your efforts at holiness of life — what are they all but doings of your own, and if they were all perfect they could not save you. Why? Because it is written, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Salvation is not a thing to be earned by a religious life, but is a free gift received by faith — Romans 6:23.

"They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work?"  
(John 6:30).

How this exhibits the works of unbelief! How difficult it is, yea impossible, for the natural man, of himself, to accept Christ and His finished work by "simple" faith! Truly, nothing but the Spirit of God can enable a man to do it. The Lord had said, "Believe." They replied, "Show us a sign." Give us something we can see along with it. Man must either see or feel before he will believe.

“We do not mean to say that salvation is not by believing on Christ, but we want some evidence first. We will believe if we can have some evidence on which to believe. Oh, perfect picture of the natural heart! I come to a man — one who has probably for years been making a profession of religion — and I say to him, ‘Have you got eternal life dwelling in you? Do you know that you are a saved man, that you have passed from death unto life?’ The reply is, ‘No, I am not sure of it.’ Then you do not believe on the Lord Jesus. You have not accepted the finished work of Christ as yours. He replies, ‘Yes, I do believe on Christ.’ Then remember what He has said, ‘He that believeth hath everlasting life.’ He does not hope to have it. He is not uncertain about it. ‘He hath it,’ says the Son of God. The man answers, ‘Well, I would believe this if I could only feel better. If I could only see in myself some evidences of a change, then I could believe it, and be as certain of it as you are.’ So said these people to the Lord — give us some evidence that we may see and believe. Do you not see that you are thus making salvation depend on the evidences of the Spirit’s work within you, instead of the finished work of the Lord Jesus for you? You say, I would believe if I could only feel better — if I could only see a change. God says, Believe first, then you shall feel — then you shall see. God reverses your order, and you must reverse it too, if you would ever have peace with God. Believe, and you will then have in your heart a *motive* for a holy life, and not only so, you will walk in liberty, and peace, and joy” (Dr. F. Whitfield).

“They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work?” The force of that is this: You have asked us to receive you as the One sent of God. What sign, then do you show; where are your credentials to authorize your mission? And this was asked, be it remembered, on the morning following the feeding of the five thousand! It seems unthinkable. Only a few hours before they had witnessed a miracle, which in some respects, was the most remarkable our Lord had performed, and from which they had themselves benefitted. And yet, does not our own sad history testify that this is true to life? Men are surrounded by innumerable evidences for the existence of God: they carry a hundred demonstrations of it in their own persons, and yet how often do they ask, What *proof* have we that there is a God? So, too, with believers. We enjoy countless tokens of His love and

faithfulness; we have witnessed His delivering hand again and again, and yet when some fresh trial comes upon us — something which completely upsets our plans, the removal, perchance, of some earthly object around which we had entwined our heart's affections — we ask, Does God really care? And, maybe, we are sufficiently callous to ask for another “sign” in proof that He does!

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat” (John 6:31).

Here they drew a disparaging contrast between Christ and Moses. It was the further workings of their unbelief. The force of their objection was this: What proof have we that Thou art greater than Moses? They sought to deprecate the miracle they had witnessed on the previous day by comparing Moses and the manna. It was as though they had said, ‘If you would have us believe on you as the Sent One of God, you must show us greater works. You have fed five thousand but once, whereas in Moses’ day, our fathers ate bread for forty years!’ It is striking to note how they harped back to their “fathers.” The woman at the well did the same thing (see John 4:12). And is it not so now? The experiences of “the fathers”, what they believed and taught, is still with many the final court of appeal.

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” Their speech betrayed them, as is evident from their use of the word “manna.” The late Malachi Taylor pointed out how this was “a name always used by their father, of wilfulness, persistently ignoring Jehovah’s word ‘bread’, and now uttered by them, because it was so written. It is notable that they of old never called it anything at all but ‘manna’ (meaning ‘What is this?’), except when they despised it (Numbers 21:5); and then they called it ‘light bread.’ And Jehovah named it ‘manna’ in Numbers 11:7 when the mixed multitude fell a lusting for the flesh-pots of Egypt. What lessons for us as to our thoughts of Christ, the Bread of God! In Psalm 78:24, where God is recounting the evil ways of Israel through the wilderness, He calls it ‘manna’; but in Psalm 105:40, where all His mercies pass in review, calling for praise, it is called ‘bread’. Again we say, What lessons for us!”

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not the bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32).

With good reason might our blessed Lord have turned away from His insulting challengers. Well might He have left them to themselves. But as another has said, “Grace in Him was active. Their souls’ interests He had at heart” (C.E.S.). And so, in wondrous condescension, He speaks to them of the Father’s “Gift”, who alone could meet their deep need, and satisfy their souls. And has He not often dealt thus with thee, dear reader? Cannot you say with the Psalmist,

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10)?

Instead of turning away in disgust at our ingratitude and unbelief, He has continued to care for us and minister to us. O how thankful ought we to be for that precious promise, and the daily fulfillment of it in our lives, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

“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 error of the Jews here should be a warning to us. They thought Moses gave them the manna. But it was God and not Moses. He was only the humble instrument. They ought to have looked through the instrument to God. But the eye rested, where it is ever so prone to rest — on the human medium. The Lord here leads them to look beyond the human instrument to God — “Moses gave you not that bread... but my Father,” etc. O what creatures of sense we are. We live so much in the outward and visible, as almost to forget there is anything beyond. All that we gaze upon here is but the avenue to what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. All the temporal gifts and blessings we receive are but the finger of the Father beckoning us within the inner shrine. He is saying to us, ‘If My works be so beautiful, if My gifts be so precious, if My footprints be so glorious, what must I be?’ Thus should we ever look through nature, to nature’s God. Thus shall we enjoy God’s gifts, when they lead us up to Him; and then shall we not make idols of them, and so run the risk of their removal.

Everything in nature and in providence is but the “Moses” between us and God. Let us not be like the Jews of old, so taken up with Moses as to forget the “greater than Moses,” whence they all proceed.

“For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” (John 6:33).

The Father’s provision for a dying world was to send from heaven His only begotten Son. There is another suggestive contrast here, yea, a double one. The manna had no power to ward off death — the generation of Israel that ate it in the wilderness died! How, then, could it be the “true bread”? No; Christ is the “true bread,” for He bestows “life.” But again: the manna was only for Israel. No other people in the desert (the Amorites, for instance) partook of the manna; for it fell only in Israel’s camp. But the true Bread “giveth life unto the world.” The “world” here does not include the whole human race, for Christ does not *bestow* “life” on every descendant of Adam. It is not here said that the true Bread *offereth* “life unto the world,” but He “giveth life.” It is the “world” of believers who are here in view. The Lord, then, designedly employs a word that reached beyond the limits of Israel, and took in elect Gentiles too!

“For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” Three different expressions are used by our Lord in this passage, each having a slightly varied meaning; the three together, serving to bring out the fulness and blessedness of this title. In verse 32 He speaks of Himself as the “true bread from heaven”: “true” speaks of that which is real, genuine, satisfying; “from heaven” tells of its celestial and spiritual character. In verse 33 He speaks of Himself as “the bread of God,” which denotes that He is Divine, eternal. Then, in verse 35 He says, “I am the bread of life”: the One who imparts, nourishes and sustains life.

“Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread” (John 6:34).

This was but the outcome of a fleeting impression which had been made by His words. It reminds us very much of the language of the woman at the well,

“Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15),

and those who recall our comments on that verse will remember the motive that prompted her. The words of these men but served to make their rejection of Him more manifest and decisive when they fully grasped His meaning: verse 36 proves this conclusively”But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.”

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).

The Lord places Himself before us under the figure of bread. The emblem is beautifully significant, and like all others used in Scripture calls for prolonged and careful meditation.

**First**, bread is a *necessary* food. Unlike many other articles of diet which are more or less luxuries, this is essential to our very existence. Bread is the food we cannot dispense with. There are other things placed upon our tables that we can do without, but not so with bread. Let us learn the lesson well. Without Christ we shall perish. There is no spiritual life or health apart from the Bread of God.

**Second**, bread is a Food that is *suited to all*. There are some people who cannot eat sweets; others are unable to digest meats. But all eat bread. The physical body may retain its life for a time without bread, but it will be sickly, and soon sink into the grave. Bread, then is adapted to all. It is the food of both king and artisan. So it is with Christ. It meets the need of all alike; He is able to satisfy every class of sinners — rich or poor, cultured or illiterate.

**Third**, bread is a *daily* food. There are some articles of food which we eat but occasionally; others only when they are in season. But bread is something we need every day of our lives. It is so spiritually. If the Christian fails to feed on Christ daily, if he substitutes the husks of religious forms and ceremonies, religious books, religious excitement, the glare and glitter of modern Christianity, he will be weak and sickly. It is failure at this very point which is mainly responsible for the feebleness of so many of the Lord’s people.

**Fourth**, bread is a *satisfying* food. We quickly tire of other articles of diet, but not so with this. Bread is a staple and standard article, which we must use all our lives. And does not the analogy hold good again spiritually? How often have we turned aside to other things, only to find them but husks! None but the Bread of life can satisfy.

**Fifth**, let us note the *process* through which bread passes before it becomes food. It springs up — the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear. Then it is *cut down*, winnowed, and ground into flour, and finally subjected to the *fiery* process of the oven. Thus, and only thus, did it become fit to sustain life. Believer in Christ, such was the experience of the Bread of God. He was “*bruised* for our iniquities.” He was subjected to the fierce fires of God’s holy wrath, as He took our place in judgment. O how wonderful — God forbid that we should ever lose our sense of wonderment over it. The Holy One of God, was “made a curse for us.” “It pleased the Lord to bruise him.” And this in order that He might be the *Bread* of life to us! Let us then feed upon Him. Let us draw from His infinite fulness. Let us ever press forward unto a more intimate fellowship with Him.

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

In verse 33 Christ had spoken of giving life to “the world” — the world of believers, the sum total of the saved. Now He speaks of the individual — “he that cometh to me... he that believeth. A similar order is to be observed in verse 37 — note the “all” is followed by “him.” There is, no doubt, a shade of difference between “believing on” Christ, and “coming to” Him. To “believe on” Christ is to receive God’s testimony concerning His Son, and to rest on Him alone for salvation. To “come to” Him — which is really the effect of the former — is for the heart to go out to Him in loving confidence. The two acts are carefully distinguished in Hebrews 11:6:

“without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is: and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

I must know who the physician is, and believe in his ability, before I shall go to him to be cured.

But what are we to understand by “shall never hunger” and “shall never thirst”? Does the Christian never “hunger” or “thirst”? Surely; then, how are we to harmonize his experience with this positive declaration of the Savior? Ah! He speaks here according to the fulness and satisfaction there is in Himself, and not according to our imperfect apprehension and appreciation of Him. If we are straitened it is in ourselves, not in Him. If we do “hunger” and “thirst,” it is not because He is unable, and not because He is unwilling, to satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst, but because we are of “little faith” and fail to draw daily from His fulness.

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not” (John 6:36).

Even the sight of Christ in the flesh, and the beholding of His wondrous miracles, did not bring men to believe on Him. O the depravity of the human heart! “Ye also have seen me, and believe not.” This shows how valueless was their request: “Lord, evermore give us this bread” (verse 34). It is unspeakably solemn. They trusted in Moses (John 9:28), they had rejoiced for a season in John the Baptist’s light (John 5:35); they could quote the Scriptures (John 6:31), and yet they believed not on Christ! It is difficult to say how far a man may go, and yet come short of the one thing needful. These men were not worse than many others, but their unbelief was manifested and declared; consequently, Christ addresses them accordingly. This, indeed, would be the result in every case, were we left to our own thoughts of Christ. Be warned then, dear reader, and make sure that *yours* is a *saving* faith.

“But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not.” Was, then, the incarnation a failure? Was His mission fruitless? That could not be. There can be no failure with God, though there is much failure in all of us to understand His purpose. Christ was not in anywise discouraged or disheartened at the apparent failure of His mission. His next word shows that very conclusively, and to it we turn.

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (John 6:37).

Here the Lord speaks of a definite company which have been given to Him by the Father. Nor is this the only place where He makes mention of this people. In John 17 He refers to their seven times over. In verse 2 He says, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to *as many as thou hast given him.*" So again in verse 6 He says, "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 again in verse 9 He declares, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." See also verses 11, 12, 24. Whom those are that the Father gave to Christ we are told in Ephesians 1:4 — "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Those given to Christ were God's elect, singled out for this marvellous honor before the foundation of the world:

["God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" \(2 Thessalonians 2:13\).](#)

But let us notice the exact connection in our passage wherein Christ refers to the elect.

In verse 36 we find our Lord saying to those who had no heart for Him, "ye also have seen me, and believe not." Was He, then, disheartened? Far from it. And why not? Ah! mark how the Son of God, here the lowly Servant of Jehovah, encourages Himself. He immediately adds, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." What a lesson is this for every under shepherd. Here is the true haven of rest for the heart of every Christ worker. Your message may be slighted by the crowd, and as you see how many there are who "believe not" it may appear that your labor is in vain. Nevertheless

["the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his" \(2 Timothy 2:19\).](#)

The eternal purpose of the Almighty cannot fail; the sovereign will of the Lord Most High cannot be frustrated. All, every one, that the Father gave to the Son before the foundation of the world "shall come to him." The Devil himself cannot keep one of them away. So take heart fellow-worker. You may seem to be sowing the Seed at

random, but God will see to it that part of it falls onto ground which He has prepared. The realization of the invincibility of the eternal counsels of God will give you a calmness, a poise, a courage, a perseverance which nothing else can.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, 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).

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” But while this is very blessed, it is solemnly tragic and deeply humbling. How humiliating for us, that in the presence of incarnate life and love in the person of the Lord of glory, no one would have come to Him, none would have benefitted by His mission, had there not been those who were given to Him by the Father, and on whose coming He could, therefore, reckon. Man’s depravity is so entire, his enmity so great, that in every instance, his will would have resisted and rejected Christ, had not the Father determined that His Son should have some as the trophies of His victory and the reward of His coming down from heaven. Alas that our deadness to such love should have called forth such sighs as seem to breathe in these very words of Christ!

“And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Let us not miss (as is so commonly done) the connection between this clause and the one which precedes it. “Him that cometh to me” is explained by “all that the Father giveth me.” None would come to Him unless the Father had first predestinated that they should, for it is only “as many as were ordained to eternal life” that believe (Acts 13:48). Each one that the Father had given to Christ in eternity past, “cometh” to Him in time — comes as a lost sinner to be saved; comes having nothing, that he may receive everything.

The last clause “I will in no wise cast out” assures the eternal preservation of everyone that truly cometh to Christ. These words of the Savior do not signify (as generally supposed) that He promises to reject none who really come to Him, though that is true; but they declare that under no imaginable circumstances will He ever expel

any one that has come. Peter came to Him and was saved. Later, he denied his Master with an oath. But did Christ “cast him out”? Nay, verily. And can we find a more extreme case? If Peter was not “cast out,” no Christian ever was, or ever will be. Praise the Lord!

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38).

This is most instructive. The force of it is this: Those whom the Father had given the Son — all of them — *would* come to Him. It was no longer the Son in His essential glory, quickening whom He would, as in verse 21, but the Son incarnate, the “Son of man” (John 6:27), *receiving* those the Father “drew” to Him (John 6:44)! “Therefore be it who it might, He would in no wise cast him out: enemy, scoffer, Jew or Gentile, they would not come if the Father had not sent them” (J.N.D.). Christ was here to do the Father’s will. Thus does Christ assure His own that He will save to the end all whom the Father had given Him.

“For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” How greatly does this enhance the value of the precious words at the close of the preceding verse, when we see that our coming to Christ is not attributed to man’s fickle will, but as the effect of the Father’s drawing to the Savior each one given to Him in the counsels of that Father’s love before the foundation of the world! So, too, the reception of them is not merely because of Christ’s compassion for the lost, but as the obedient Servant of the Father’s will, He welcomes each one brought to Him — brought by the unseen drawings of the Father’s love. Thus our security rests not upon anything in us or from us, but upon the Father’s choice and the Son’s obedient love!

“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” (John 6:39).

How blessedly this, too, explains the closing words of verse 37! *Eternal predestination guarantees eternal preservation.* The “last day” is, of course, the last day of the Christian dispensation. Then it shall appear that He *hath not* lost a single one whom the Father gave to Him. Then shall He say,

“Behold I and the children which God hath given me”  
(Hebrews 2:13).

“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 6:40).

Christ had just spoken of the Father’s counsels. He had disclosed the fact that the success of His ministry depended not on man’s will — for that was known to be, in every case, so perverse as to reject the Savior — but on the drawing power of the Father. But here He leaves, as it were, the door wide open to any one any where who is disposed to enter: “that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.” Yet it is instructive to note the order of the two verbs here: “believing” on Christ is the result of “seeing” Him. He must first be revealed by the Spirit before He will be received by the sinner. Thus did our Lord disclose to these men that a far deeper and infinitely more important work had been entrusted to Him than that of satisfying Israel’s poor with material bread not less a change than that of raising up at the last day all that had been given to Him by the Father, without losing so much as one.

The following questions are submitted to help the student for the next chapter on John 6:41-59: —

1. Wherein does verse 44 rebuke their “murmuring”?
2. What ought to have been their response to verse 44?
3. Who are the “all” that are “taught of God”? verse 45.
4. What is meant by “not die”? verse 50.
5. What are the various thoughts suggested by “eat”? verse 51.
6. What is the difference in thought between verses 53 and 56?
7. What is meant by “I live by the Father”? verse 57.

# JOHN 6:41-59

## CHRIST IN THE CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. The murmuring of the Jews: verses 41, 42.
2. Christ's rebuke: verses 43-45.
3. The glory of Christ: verse 46.
4. Christ, the Life-giver: verses 47-51.
5. The criticism of the Jews: verse 52.
6. Christ's solemn reply: verse 53.
7. The results of feeding on Christ: verses 54-59.

The first thirteen verses of John 6 describe the feeding of the multitude, and in verses 14 and 15 we are shown what effect that miracle had upon the crowd. From verse 16 to the end of verse 21 we have the well-known incident of the disciples in the storm, and the Lord walking on the sea and coming to their deliverance. In verses 22 to 25 we see the people following Christ to Capernaum, and in verses 26 to 40 we learn of the conversation which took place between them and our Lord — most probably in the open air. At verse 41 there is a break in the chapter, and a new company is introduced, namely, “the Jews”; and from verse 59 it is clear that they were in the synagogue. In this Gospel “the Jews” are ever viewed as antagonistic to the Savior — see our notes on verse 15. Here they are represented as “murmuring” because the Lord had said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” This does not prove that they had heard His words which are recorded in verse 33. Note it does not say in verse 41 that the Lord had said this “unto them”: contrast verses 29, 32, 35! Most probably, the words He had spoken to “the people” of verse 24 — words which are recorded in the verses which follow, to the end of verse 40 — had been *reported* to “the Jews.” Hence, verses 41 to 59 describe the conversation between Christ and the Jews in the Capernaum synagogue, as the preceding verses narrate what passed between the Savior and the Galileans. The Holy Spirit has placed the two conversations side by side, because of the similarity of their themes.

“The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:41).

“In John ‘the Jews’ are always distinguished from the multitude. They are the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea. It would, perhaps, be easier to understand this Gospel, if the words were rendered ‘those of Judea’, which is the true sense” (J.N.D.).

These Jews were “murmuring,” and it is a significant thing that the same word is used here as in the Septuagint (the first Gentile translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) of Israel murmuring in the wilderness. In few things does the depravity of the human heart reveal itself so plainly and so frequently as in *murmuring* against God. It is a sin which few, if any, are preserved from.

The Jews were murmuring against Christ. They were murmuring against Him because He had said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” This was a saying that offended them. And why should that cause them to murmur? They were, of course, completely blind to Christ’s Divine glory, and so were ignorant that this very One whom some of them had seen grow up before their eyes in the humble home of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth, and the One that some of them, perhaps, had seen working at the carpenter’s bench, should make a claim which they quickly perceived avowed His Deity. It was the pride of the human heart disdaining to be indebted to One who had lain aside His glory, and had taken upon Him the form of a servant. They refused to be beholden to One so lowly. Moreover, they were far too self-satisfied and self-righteous to see any need for One to come down from heaven to them, much less for that One to die upon the Cross to meet their need and thus become their Savior. Their case, as they thought, was by no means so desperate as that. The truth is, they had *no hunger* for “the bread which came down from heaven.” What light this casts on the state of the world today! How it serves to explain the common treatment which the Lord of glory still receives at the hands of men! Pride, the wicked pride of the self-righteous heart, is responsible for unbelief. Men despise and reject the Savior because they feel not their deep need of Him. Feeding upon the husks which are fit food only for swine, they have no appetite for the true Bread. And when the claims of Christ are really pressed upon them they still “murmur”!

“And they said, 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?” (John 6:42).

This shows that these Jews understood Christ’s words “I am the bread which came down from heaven” as signifying that He was of Divine origin; and in this they were quite right. None but He could truthfully make the claim. This declaration of Christ meant that He had personally existed in heaven before He appeared among men, and, as His forerunner testified, “He that cometh from above is above all” (John 3:31): above all, because the first man and all his family are of the earth, earthy; but “the second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47). And for the Lord to become Man required the miracle of the virgin birth: a supernatural Being could only enter this world in a supernatural manner. But these Jews were in total ignorance of Christ’s superhuman origin. They supposed Him to be the natural son of Joseph and Mary. His “father and mother,” said they, “we know.” But they did not. His Father, they knew not of, nor could they, unless the Father revealed Himself unto them. And it is so still. It is one thing to receive, intellectually, as a religious dogma, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; it is altogether another to know Him as such for myself. Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to me (Matthew 16:17).

“Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. 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” (John 6:43, 44).

This word is very solemn coming just at this point, and it is necessary to note carefully its exact connection. It was a word which at once exposed the moral condition and explained the cause of the “murmuring” of these Jews. Great care must be taken to observe what Christ did not say, and precisely what He did say. He did not say, “No man can come to me, except the Father hath given him to me,” true as that certainly is. But He spoke here so as to address their human responsibility. It was not designed as a word to repel, but to humble. It was not closing the door in their face, but showed how alone that door could be entered. It was not intended as an intimation that there was no possible hope for them, rather was it a

pointing out the direction in which hope lay. Had Saul of Tarsus then been among the number who heard these searching words of Christ, they would have applied in full force in his own case and condition; and yet it became manifest, subsequently, that he was a vessel of mercy, given to the Son by the Father before the foundation of the world. And it is quite possible that some of these very Jews, then murmuring, were among the number who, at Pentecost, were drawn by the Father to believe on the Son. The Lord's language was carefully chosen, and left room for that. John 7:5 tells us that the Lord's own brethren (according to the flesh) did not believe on Him at first, and yet, later, they ranked among His disciples, as is clear from Acts 1:14. Let us be careful, then, not to read into this 44th verse what is not there.

[“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” \(John 6:44\).](#)

These words of Christ make manifest the depths of human depravity. They expose the inveterate stubbornness of the human will. They explain the “murmuring” of these Jews. In answering them thus, the obvious meaning of the Savior's words was this: By your murmuring you make it evident that you have not come to Me, that you are not disposed to come to Me; and with your present self-righteousness, you never will come to Me. Before you come to Me you must be converted and become as little children. And before that can take place, you must be the subjects of Divine operation. One has only to reflect on the condition of the natural man in order to see the indubitable truth of this. Salvation is most exactly suited to the sinner's needs, but it is not at all suited to his natural inclinations. The Gospel is too spiritual for his carnal mind: too humbling for his pride: too exacting for his rebellious will: too lofty for his darkened understanding: too holy for his earthbound desires.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” How can one who has a high conceit of himself and his religious performances admit that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags? How can one who prides himself on his morality and his religiousness, own himself as lost, undone, and justly condemned? How can one who sees so little amiss in himself, who is blind to the fact that from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot there is no

soundness in him (Isaiah 1:6), earnestly seek the great Physician? No man with an unchanged heart and mind will ever embrace God's salvation. The inability here, then, is a moral one. Just as when Christ also said, "*how can ye, being evil, speak good things?*" (Matthew 12:34). And again, "*How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another?*" (John 5:44). And again, "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive" (John 14:17). Water will not flow uphill, nor will the natural man act contrary to his corrupt nature. An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit, and equally impossible is it for a heart that loves the darkness to also love the light.

The depravity of man is, from the human side, the only thing which will explain the general rejection of the Gospel. The only satisfactory answer to the questions, Why is not Christ cordially received by all to whom He is presented? Why do the majority of men despise and reject Him? is man is a fallen creature, a depraved being who loves sin and hates holiness. So, too, the only satisfactory answer which can be given to the questions, Why is the Gospel cordially received by any man? Why is it not obstinately rejected by all? is, In the case of those who believe, God has, by His supernatural influence, counteracted against the human depravity; in other words, the Father has "drawn" to the Son.

The condition of the natural man is altogether beyond human repair. To talk about exerting the will is to ignore the state of the man behind the will. Man's will has not escaped the general wreckage of his nature. When man fell, every part of his being was affected. Just as truly as the sinner's heart is estranged from God and his understanding darkened, so is his will enslaved by sin. To predicate the freedom of the will is to *deny* that man is totally depraved. To say that man has the power within himself to either reject or accept Christ, is to repudiate the fact that he is the captive of the Devil. It is to say there is at least one good thing in the flesh. It is to flatly contradict this word of the Son of God — "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Man's only hope lies *outside* of himself, in Divine help. And this is what we meant above when we said that this word of Christ was not intended to close the door of hope, but pointed out the direction in

which hope lay. If it be true that I cannot get away from myself; if it be true that my whole being is depraved, and therefore at enmity with God; if it be true that I am powerless to reverse the tendency of my nature, what then can I do? Why, *acknowledge* my helplessness, and cry for help. What should a man do who falls down and breaks his hip? He cannot rise: should he, then, lie there in his misery and perish? Not if he has any *desire for relief*. He will lift up his voice and summon assistance. And if these murmuring Jews had believed what Christ told them about their helplessness, this is what they had done. And if the unsaved today would only believe God when He says that the sinner is lost, he, too, would call for a Deliverer. If I cannot come to Christ except the Father “draws” me, then my responsibility is to beg the Father to “draw” me.

In what, we may inquire, does this “drawing” consist? It certainly has reference to something more than the invitation of the Gospel. The word used is a strong one, signifying, the putting forth of power and *obliging* the object seized to respond. The same word is found in John 18:10; John 21:6, 11. If the reader consults these passages he will find that it means far more than “to attract.” *Impel* would give the true force of it here in John 6:44.

As said above, the unregenerate sinner is so depraved that with an unchanged heart and mind he will never come to Christ. And the change which is absolutely essential is one which God alone can produce. It is, therefore, by Divine “drawing” that any one comes to Christ. What is this “drawing”? We answer, It is the power of the Holy Spirit overcoming the self-righteousness of the sinner, and convicting him of his lost condition. It is the Holy Spirit awakening within him a sense of need. It is the power of the Holy Spirit overcoming the pride of the natural man, so that he is ready to come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar. It is the Holy Spirit creating within him an hunger for the bread of life.

“It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45).

Our Lord confirms what He had just said by an appeal to the Scriptures. The reference is to Isaiah 54:13: “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” This serves to explain, in part at least, the meaning of “draw.” Those drawn are they who are “taught of

God.” And who are these, so highly favored? The quotation from Isaiah 54 tells us: they are God’s “children”; His own, His elect. Notice carefully how our Lord quoted Isaiah 54:13. He simply said, “And they shall be all taught of God.” This helps us to define the “all” in other passages, like John 12:32: “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” The “all” *does not mean* all of humanity, but all of God’s children, all His elect.

“Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45).

This also throws light on the “drawing” of the previous verse. Those drawn are they who have “heard” and “learned of the Father.” That is to say, God has given them an ear to hear and a heart to perceive. It is parallel with what we get in 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” “Called” here refers to the effectual and irresistible call of God. It is a call which is heard with the inward ear. It is a call which is instinct with Divine power, drawing its object to Christ Himself.

“Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father” (John 6:46).

This is very important. It guards against a false inference. It was spoken to prevent His hearers (and us today) from supposing that some direct communication from the Father is necessary before a sinner can be saved. Christ had just affirmed that only those come to Him who had heard and learned of the Father. But this does not mean that such characters hear His *audible* voice or are *directly* spoken to by Him. Only the Savior was [and is] in immediate communication with the Father. We hear and learn from the Father only through His written Word! So much then for the primary significance of this verse according to its local application. But there is far more in it than what we have just sought to bring out.

“Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.” How this displays the *glory* of Christ, bringing out, as it does, the infinite distance there is between the incarnate Son and all men on earth. No man had seen the Father; but the One

speaking had, and He had because He is “of (not “the Father” but) God.” He is a member of the Godhead, Himself very God of very God. And because He had “seen the Father,” He was fully qualified to speak of Him, to reveal Him — see John 1:18. And who else *could* “declare” the Father? How else could the light of the Father’s love and grace have shined into our hearts, but through and by Christ, His Son?

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47).

Christ still pursues the line of truth begun in verse 44. This forty-seventh verse is not an invitation to sinners, but a doctrinal declaration concerning saints. In verse 44 He had stated what was essential from the Divine side if a sinner come to Christ: he must be “drawn” by the Father. In verse 45 He defined, in part, what this “drawing” consists of: it is hearing and learning of the Father. Then, having guarded against a false inference from His words in verse 45, the Savior now says, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Believing is not the cause of a sinner obtaining Divine life, rather is it the effect of it. The fact that a man believes, is the evidence that he already has Divine life within him. True, the sinner ought to believe. Such is his bounden duty. And in addressing sinners from the standpoint of human responsibility, it is perfectly proper to say ‘Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.’ Nevertheless, the fact remains that no unregenerate sinner ever did or ever will believe. The unregenerate sinner ought to love God, and love Him with all his heart. He is commanded to. But he does not, and will not, until Divine grace gives him a new heart. So he ought to believe, but he will not till he has been quickened into newness of life. Therefore, we say that when any man does believe, is found believing, it is proof positive that he is already in possession of eternal life. “He that believeth on me hath (already has) eternal life”: cf. John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:1, etc.

“I am that bread of life” (John 6:48). This is the first of the seven “I am” titles of Christ found in this Gospel, and found nowhere else. The others are, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the door” (John 10:9); “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11); “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25); “I am the way, the truth, and

the life” (John 14:6); “I am the true vine” (15:1). They all look back to that memorable occasion when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, and bade him go down into Egypt, communicate with His people, interview Pharaoh, and command him to let the children of God go forth into the wilderness to worship Jehovah. And when Moses asked, Who shall I say hath sent me?, the answer was,

“Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14).

Here in John, we have a sevenfold filling out of the “I am” — I am the bread of life, etc. Christ’s employment of these titles at once identifies Him with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and unequivocally demonstrates His absolute Deity.

“I am that bread of life.” Blessed, precious words are these. ‘I am that which every sinner needs, and without which he will surely perish. I am that which alone can satisfy the soul and fill the aching void in the unregenerate heart. I am that because, just as wheat is ground into flour and then subjected to the action of fire to fit it for human use, so I, too, have come down all the way from heaven to earth, have passed through the sufferings of death, and am now presented in the Gospel to all that hunger for life.’

“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die” (John 6:49, 50).

This is an amplification of verse 48. There He had said, “I am that bread of life”; here He describes one of the characteristic qualities of this “life.” The Lord draws a contrast between Himself as the Bread of life and the manna which Israel ate in the wilderness; and also between the effects on those who ate the one and those who should eat the other. The fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, but they died. The manna simply ministered to a temporal need. It fed their bodies, but was not able to immortalize them. But those who eat the true bread, shall not die. Those who appropriate Christ to themselves, those who satisfy their hearts by feeding on Him, shall live forever. Not, of course, on earth, but with Him in heaven.

“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die” (John 6:50).

It is obvious that Christ gives the word “die” a different meaning here from what it bears in the previous verse. There He had said that they, who of old ate manna in the wilderness, “are dead”: natural death, physical dissolution being in view. But here He says that a man may eat of the bread which cometh down from heaven, and “not die”: that is, not die spiritually and eternally, not suffer the “second death.” Should any object to this interpretation which gives a different meaning to the word “death” as it occurs in two consecutive verses, we would remind him that in a single verse the word is found twice, but with a different meaning: “Let the dead bury their dead” (Luke 9:60).

This is one of the many, many verses of Scripture which affirms the eternal security of the believer. The life which God imparts in sovereign grace to the poor sinner, is — not a life that may be forfeited; for, “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29.) It is not a life which is perishable, for it is “hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3.) It is not a life which ends when our earthly pilgrimage is over, for it is “eternal life.” Ah! what has the world to offer in comparison with this? Do the worldling’s fondest dreams of happiness embrace the element of unending continuity? No, indeed; that is the one thing lacking, the want of which spoils all the rest!

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:51).

How evident it is then that Christ is here addressing these Jews on the ground, not of God’s secret counsels, but, of their human responsibility. It is true that none will come to Him save as they are “drawn” by the Father; but this does not mean that the Father refuses to “draw” any poor sinner that really *desires* Christ. Yea, that very desire for Christ is the proof the Father has commenced to “draw.” And how Divinely simple is the way in which Christ is received — “If any man [no matter who he be] eat of this bread he shall live forever.” The figure of “eating” is very suggestive, and one deserving of careful meditation.

In the first place, eating is *a necessary act* if I am to derive that advantage from bread which it is intended to convey, namely, bodily nourishment. I may look at bread and admire it; I may philosophize about bread and analyze it; I may talk about bread and eulogize its quality; I may handle bread and be assured of its excellency — but unless I eat it, I shall not be nourished by it. All of this is equally true with the spiritual bread, Christ. Knowing the truth, speculating about it, talking about it, contending for it, will do me no good. I must receive it into my heart.

In the second place, eating is *responding to a felt need*. That need is hunger, unmistakably evident, acutely felt. And when one is really hungry he asks no questions, he makes no demurs, he raises no quibbles, but gladly and promptly partakes of that which is set before him. So it is, again, spiritually. Once a sinner is awakened to his lost condition; once he is truly conscious of his deep, deep need, once he becomes aware of the fact that without Christ he will perish eternally; then, whatever intellectual difficulties may have previously troubled him, however much he may have procrastinated in the past, now he will need no urging, but promptly and gladly will he receive Christ as his own.

In the third place, eating implies *an act of appropriation*. The table may be spread, and loaded down with delicacies, and a liberal portion may have been placed on my plate, but not until I commence to eat do I make that food my own. Then, that food which previously was without me, is taken inside, assimilated, and becomes a part of me, supplying health and strength. So it is spiritually. Christ may be presented to me in all His attractiveness, I may respect His wonderful personality, I may admire His perfect life, I may be touched by His unselfishness and tenderness, I may be moved to tears at the sight of Him dying on the cruel Tree; but, not until I appropriate Him, not until I receive Him as mine, shall I be saved. Then, He who before was outside, will indwell me. Now, in very truth, shall I know Him as the bread of life, ministering daily to my spiritual health and strength.

In the fourth place, eating is *an intensely personal act*: it is something which no one else can do for me. There is no such thing as eating by proxy. If I am to be nourished, I must, myself, eat.

Standing by and watching others eat will not supply my needs. So, dear reader, no one can believe in Christ for you. The preacher cannot; your loved ones cannot. And you may have witnessed others receiving Christ as theirs; you may later hear their ringing testimonies; you may be struck by the unmistakable change wrought in their lives; but, unless you have “eaten” the Bread of life, unless you have personally received Christ as yours, it has all availed you nothing. “If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.” Divinely simple and yet wonderfully full is this figure of eating.

“And the bread that I will give is my flesh” (John 6:51). Exceedingly solemn and exceedingly precious is this. To “give” His “flesh” was to offer Himself as a sacrifice, it was to voluntarily lay down His life. Here, then, Christ presents Himself, not only as One who came down from heaven, but as One who had come here to die. And not unto we reach this point do we come to the heart of the Gospel. As an awakened sinner beholds the person of Christ, as he reads the record of His perfect life down here, he will exclaim, “Woe is me; I am undone.” Every line in the lovely picture which the Holy Spirit has given us in the four Gospels only condemns me, for it shows me how unlike I am to the Holy One of God. I admire His ways: I marvel at His perfections. I wish that I could be like Him. But, alas, I am altogether unlike Him. If Christ be the One that the Father delights in, then verily, He can never delight in me; for His ways and mine are as far apart as the east is from the west. O what is to become of me, wretched man that I am! Ah! dear reader, what had become of every one of us if Christ had only glorified the Father by a brief sojourn here as the perfect Son of man?

What hope had there been if, with garments white and glistening, and face radiant with a glory surpassing that of the midday sun, He had ascended from the Mount of Transfiguration, leaving this earth forever? There is only one answer: the door of hope had been fast closed against every member of Adam’s fallen and guilty race. But blessed be His name, wonderful as was His descent from heaven, wonderful as was that humble birth in Bethlehem’s lowly manger, wonderful as was the flawless life that He lived here for thirty-three years as He tabernacled among men; yet, that was not all, that was not the most wonderful. Read this fifty-first verse of John 6 again: “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.” Ah! it is only in a slain Christ that poor sinners can find that which meets their dire and solemn need. And His “flesh” He gave in voluntary and vicarious sacrifice “for the life of the world”: not merely for the Jews, but for elect sinners of the Gentiles too. His meritorious life was substituted for our forfeited life. Surely this will move our hearts to fervent praise. Surely this will cause us to bow before Him in adoring worship.

“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52).

“It is difficult, or rather impossible, to say what was the precise state of mind which this question indicated on the part of those who proposed it. It is not unlikely that it expressed different sentiments in different individuals. With some it probably was a contemptuous expression of utter incredulity, grounded on the alleged obvious absurdity of the statement made: *q.d.*, ‘The man is mad; can any absurdity exceed this? We are to live for ever by eating the flesh of a living man!’ With others, who thought that neither our Lord’s words nor works were like those of a madman, the question probably was equivalent to a statement — ‘These words must have a meaning different from their literal signification, but what can that meaning be?’

“These ‘strivings’ of the Jews about the meaning of our Lord’s words were ‘among themselves’. None of them seemed to have stated their sentiments to our Lord, but He was perfectly aware of what was going on among them. He does not, however, proceed to explain His former statements. They were not ready for such an explication. It would have been worse than lost on them. Instead of illustrating His statement, He reiterated it. He in no degree explains away what had seemed strange, absurd, incredible, or unintelligible. On the contrary, He becomes, if possible, more paradoxical and enigmatical than ever, in order that His statement might be more firmly rooted in their memory, and that they might the more earnestly inquire, ‘What can these mysterious words mean?’ He tells them that, strange and unintelligible, and incredible, and absurd, as

His statements might appear, He had said nothing but what was indubitably true, and incalculably important” (Dr. John Brown).

“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” (John 6:53).

This verse and the two that follow contain an amplification of what He had said in verse 51. He was shortly to offer Himself as a Substitutionary victim, an expiatory sacrifice, in the room of and in order to secure the salvation, of both Jews and Gentiles. And this sacrificial death must be appropriated, received into the heart by faith, if men are to be saved thereby. Except men “eat the flesh” and “drink the blood” of Christ, they have “no life” in them. For a man to have “no life” in him means that he continues in spiritual death: in that state of condemnation, moral pollution, and hopeless wretchedness into which sin has brought him.

Observe that it is as Son of man He here speaks of Himself. How could He have suffered death if He had not become incarnate? And the incarnation was in order to His death. How this links together the mysteries of Bethlehem and Calvary; the incarnation and the Cross! And, as we have said, the one was in order to the other. He came from heaven to earth in order to die:

“but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” Difficult as this language first appears, it is really blessedly simple. It is not a dead Christ which the sinner is to feed upon, but on the death of One who is now alive forever more. His death is mine, when appropriated by faith; and thus appropriated, it becomes life in me. The figure of “eating” looks back, perhaps, to Genesis 3. Man died (spiritually) by “eating” (of the forbidden fruit) and he is made alive (spiritually) by an act of eating!

**“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).**

Notice the change in the tense of the verb. In the previous verse it is, “Except ye eat”; here it is “whoso eateth.” In the former, the verb is in the aorist tense, implying a single act, an act done once for all. In the latter, the verb is in the perfect tense, denoting that which is continuous and characteristic. Verse 53 defines the difference between one who is lost and one who is saved. In order to be saved, I must “eat” the flesh and “drink” the blood of the Son of man; that is, I must appropriate Him, make Him mine by an act of faith. This act of receiving Christ is done once for all. I cannot receive Him a second time, for He never leaves me! But, having received Him to the saving of my soul, I now feed on Him constantly, daily, as the Food of my soul. Exodus 12 supplies us with an illustration. First, the Israelite was to apply the shed blood of the slain lamb. Then, as protected by that blood, he was to feed on the lamb itself.

“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” This confirms our interpretation of the previous verse. If we compare it with verse 47 it will be seen at once the “eating” is equivalent to “believing.” Note, too, that the tense of the verbs is the same: verse 47 “believeth,” verse 54 “eateth.” And observe how each of these are evidences of eternal life, already in possession of the one thus engaged: “He that believeth on me hath eternal life”; “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.”

This passage in John 6 is a favorite one with Ritualists, who understand it to refer to the Lord’s Supper. But this is certainly a mistake, and that for the following reasons. First, the Lord’s Supper had not been instituted when Christ delivered this discourse. Second, Christ was here addressing Himself to un-believers, and the Lord’s Supper is for saints, not unregenerate sinners. Third, the eating and drinking here spoken of are in order to salvation; but eating and drinking at the Lord’s table are for those who have been saved.

**“For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (John 6:55).**

The connection between this and the previous verse is obvious. It is brought in, no doubt, to prevent a false inference being drawn from the preceding words. Christ had thrown the emphasis on the “eating.” Except a man ate His flesh, he had no life in him. But now our Lord brings out the truth that there is nothing *meritorious* in the act of eating; that is to say, there is no mystical power in faith itself. The nourishing power is in the *food* eaten; and the potency of faith lies in its *Object*.

“For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” Here Christ throws the emphasis on *what it is* which must be “eaten.” It is true in the natural realm. It is not the mere eating of anything which will nourish us. If a man eat a poisonous substance he will be killed; if he eat that which is innutritious he will starve. Equally so is it spiritually.

“There are many strong believers in hell, and on the road to hell; but they are those who believed a lie, and not the truth as it is in Christ Jesus” (Dr. J. Brown).

It is Christ who alone can save: Christ as crucified, but now alive for evermore.

“He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (John 6:56).

In this, and the following verse, Christ proceeds to state some of the blessed *effects* of eating. The first effect is that the saved sinner is brought into vital union with Christ, and enjoys the most intimate *fellowship* with Him. The word “dwelleth” is commonly translated “abideth.” It always has reference to *communion*. But mark the tense of the verb: it is only the one who “eateth” and “drinketh” constantly that abides in unbroken fellowship with Christ.

“He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” This language clearly implies, though it does not specifically mention the fact, that Christ would rise from the dead, for only as risen could He dwell in the believer, and the believer in Him. It is, then, with Christ risen, that they who feed on Him as slain, are identified — so marvelously identified, that Scripture here, for the first time, speaks of union with our blessed Lord.

“As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (John 6:57).

How evident it is, again, that Christ is here speaking of Himself as the Mediator, and not according to His essential Being: it is Christ not in Godhead glory, but as the Son incarnate, come down from heaven. “I live by the Father” means He lived His life in dependence upon the Father. This is what He stressed in replying to Satan’s first assault in the temptation. When the Devil said, “If thou be the Son of God, command,” etc., he was not (as commonly supposed) casting doubt on the Deity of Christ, but asking Him to make a wrong use of it. “If” must be understood as “since,” same as in John 14:2; Colossians 3:1, etc. The force of what the Tempter said is this: Since you are the Son of God, exercise your Divine prerogatives, use your Divine power and supply your bodily need. But this ignored the fact that the Son had taken upon Him the “form of a servant” and had entered (voluntarily) the place of subjection. Therefore, it is of this the Savior reminds him in His reply — “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” How beautifully this illustrates what Christ says here, “I live by the Father”! Let us then seek grace to heed its closing sentence: “so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” Just as the incarnate Son, when on earth, lived in humble dependence on the Father, so now the believer is to live his daily life in humble *dependence* on Christ.

“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 forever” (John 6:58).

There is an important point in this verse which is lost to the English reader. Two different words for eating are here employed by Christ. “Your fathers did eat (ephazon) manna”; “he that *eateth* (trogon) of this bread shall live forever.” The verb “phago” means “to eat, consume, eat up.” “Trogo signifies to feed upon, rather than the mere act of eating. The first, Christ used when referring to Israel eating the manna in the wilderness: the second was employed when referring to believers feeding on Himself. The one is a carnal eating, the other a spiritual; the one ends in death, the other ministers life. The Israelites in the wilderness saw nothing more than an objective

article of food. And they were like many today, who see nothing more in Christianity than the objective side, and know nothing of the spiritual and experiential! How many there be who are occupied with the externals of religion — outward performances, etc. How few really *feed* upon Christ. They admire Him objectively, but receive Him not into their hearts.

“These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum” (John 6:59).

What effect this discourse of Christ had on those who heard Him will be considered in our next chapter. Meanwhile, let the interested reader meditate upon the following questions: —

1. At what, in particular, were the disciples “offended”: verses 60, 61?
2. What is the meaning of verse 63?
3. What is the force of the “therefore” in verse 65?
4. What does the “going back” of those disciples prove: verse 66?
5. Why did Christ challenge the twelve: verse 67?
6. What was the assurance of Peter based on: verse 68?
7. Why was there a Judas in the apostolate: verse 71? How many reasons can you give?

# JOHN 6:60-71

## CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Many disciples offended at Christ's discourse: verse 60.
2. Christ's admonition: verses 61-65.
3. Many disciples leave Christ: verse 66.
4. Christ's challenge to the Twelve: verse 67.
5. Simon Peter's confession: verses 68, 69.
6. Christ corrects Peter: verse 70.
7. The betrayer: verse 71.

The passage before us is one that is full of pathos. It brings us to the conclusion of our Lord's ministry in Galilee. It shows us the outcome of His ministry there. Here, He had performed some wonderful miracles, and had given out some gracious teachings. It was here, that He had turned the water into wine; here, He had healed the nobleman's son, without so much as seeing him; here, He had fed the hungry multitude. Each of these miracles plainly accredited His Divine mission, and evidenced His Deity. None other ever performed such works as these. Before such evidence unbelief was excuseless. Moreover, He had presented Himself, both to the crowd outside and to the Jews inside the synagogue, as the Bread of life. He had freely offered eternal life to them, and had solemnly warned that, "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (verse 53). What, then, was their response to all of this?

It is indeed pathetic to find that here in Galilee Christ met with no better reception than had been His in Judea, and it is striking to see how closely the one resembled that of the other. He had begun His ministry in Judea, and, for a season, His success there, judged by human standards, seemed all that could be desired. Crowds followed Him, and many seemed anxious to be His disciples. But all is not gold that glitters. It soon became evident that the crowds were actuated by motives of an earthly and carnal character. Few gave

evidence of any sense of spiritual need. Few, if any, seemed to discern the real purpose of His mission. A spirit of partisanship was rife, so we read,

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee” (John 4:1, 3).

How was it, then, in Galilee? It was simply a repetition of what had happened in Judea. Human nature is the same wherever it is found: that is why history so constantly repeats itself. Here in Galilee, the crowds, had followed Him. For a brief season, He was their popular idol. And yet, few of them manifested any signs that their consciences were stirred or their hearts exercised. Fewer still understood the real purport of His mission. And now that He had declared it, now that He had pressed upon them their spiritual need, they were offended: many who had posed as His disciples, turned back, and walked no more with Him.

How many of the Lord’s servants have had a similar experience. They entered some field of service, and for a time the crowd thronged their ministry. For a season they were popular with those among whom they labored. But, then, if the servant was faithful to his Master, if he pressed the claims of Christ, if he shunned not to declare all the counsel of God, — then, how noticeable the change! Then, arose a “murmuring” (John 6:41); there was a “striving” among those who heard him (John 6:52); there was a querulous “This is a hard saying” (verse 61); there was a “many” of “the disciples” going back, and walking “no more with him” (verse 66). But sufficient for the servant to be as his Master. Let him thank God that there is a little company left who recognize and appreciate “the words of eternal life” (verse 68), for they are of far greater price in the sight of God than “the many” who “went back.” Ah! dear reader, this is indeed a *living* Word, mirroring the fickle and wicked heart as faithfully today as it did two thousand years ago!

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60).

The wonderful discourse in the synagogue, following the one given to the people on the outside, was now over. We are here shown the

effect of it on the disciples. A “disciple” means one who is a learner. These “disciples” are carefully distinguished from “the twelve.” They were made up of a class of people who were, in measure, attracted by the person of Christ and who were, more especially, impressed by His miracles. But how real this attraction was, and how deep the impression made, we are now given to see. When Christ had presented Himself not as the Wonder-worker, but as the Bread of God; when He had spoken of giving His flesh for the life of the world, and of men drinking His blood, which signified that He would die, and die a death of violence; when He insisted that except they ate His flesh and drank His blood “they had no life” in them; and, above all, when He announced that man is so depraved and so alienated from God, that except the Father draw him, he would never come to Christ for salvation: they were all offended. It will be seen, then, that we take the words, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” as referring to the whole of the discourse which Christ had just delivered in the Capernaum synagogue.

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” The simple meaning of this is, that these disciples were offended. It was not that they found the language of Christ so obscure as to be unintelligible, but what they had heard was so irreconcilable with their own views that they would not receive it. What their own views were, comes out plainly in John 12. When Christ signified what death He should die, “The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ *abideth for ever*: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?” (verse 34).

In applying the above verse to ourselves, two things should be noted. First, that when today professing Christians criticize a servant of God who is really giving out Divine truth, and complain that his teaching is “An hard saying,” it is always to be traced back to the same cause as operated here. Many disciples will still reject the Word of God when it is ministered in the power of the Spirit, and they will do so because it conflicts with their own views and contravenes the traditions of their fathers! In the second place, note that these men complained among themselves. This is evident from the next verse: “When Jesus *knew in himself* that his disciples murmured at it.” They did not come directly to Christ and openly

state their difficulties. They did not ask Him to explain His meaning. And why? Because they were not really anxious *for light*. Had they been so, they would have sought it from Him. Again we say, How like human nature today! When the Lord's messenger delivers a word that is distasteful to his hearers, they are not manly enough to come to him and tell him their grievance, far less will they approach him seeking help. No, like the miserable cowards they are, they will skulk in the background, seeking to sow the seeds of dissension by criticizing what they have heard. And such people the servant of God will have no difficulty in placing: they may wear the badge of disciples, but he will know from their actions and speech that they are not believers!

[“When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?” \(John 6:61\).](#)

How solemn this is! These men could not deceive Christ. They might have walked with Him for a time (verse 66); they might have posed as His disciples (verse 60); they might have taken their place in the synagogue (verse 59), and listened with seeming attention and reverence while He taught them; but He knew their hearts: those they could not hide from Him. Nor can men do so today. He is not misled by all the religiosity of the day. His eyes of fire pierce through every mask of hypocrisy. Learn, then, the consummate folly and utter worthlessness of “a form of godliness” without its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

“When Jesus *knew in himself* that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?” How this evidenced, once more, His deity! At the beginning of our chapter He had been regarded as a “prophet”; but a greater than a prophet was here. Later, an insulting contrast had been drawn between Moses and Christ; but a greater than Moses was before them. Neither Moses nor any of the prophets had been able to read the hearts of men. But here was One who knew in Himself when these disciples murmured. He knew, too, why they murmured. He knew they were offended. Plainly, then, this must be God Incarnate, for none but the Lord Himself can read the heart.

[“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” \(John 6:62\).](#)

Here we have the third great fact which this chapter brings out concerning Christ. First, He referred to the Divine incarnation: He was the Bread which had “come down from heaven” (verse 41). Second, He was going to die, and die a death of violence: the repeated mention of His “blood,” showed that (verses 52, 55, etc.). Third, He would ascend to heaven, thus returning to that place from whence He had come. His ascension involved, of necessity, His resurrection. Thus does our chapter make dear reference to each of the vital crises in the history of Christ.

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” Soon would the Son of God return to that sphere of unmingled blessedness and highest glory from whence he came to Bethlehem’s manger; and that, in order to go to Calvary’s Cross. But He would return there as “the Son of man.” This is indeed a marvel. A man is now seated upon the throne of the Father — the God-man. And because of His descent and ascent, heaven is the home of every one who, by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, becomes a partaker of His life. And because of this, earth becomes a wilderness, a place of exile, through which we pass, the children of faith, as strangers and pilgrims. Soon, thank God, shall His prayer be answered:

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be *with me* where I am” (John 17:24).

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” This is one of several intimations that during the days of His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus looked beyond the Cross, with all its dread horror, to the joy and rest and glory beyond. As the apostle tells us in Hebrews 12:2, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for *the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame.” It is striking to note how the ascension is made typically prominent at the beginning of John 6: see verses 3 and 15 — “Jesus went up into *a mount*.”

It is to be observed that Christ did not positively declare that these murmurers should “see” Him as He ascended, but He merely asked them if they would be offended at such a sight. It seems to us He designedly left the door open. There is no room for doubt but that

many became real believers for the first time after He had risen from the dead. The fact that 1 Corinthians 15:6 tells us He was seen of “above five hundred brethren” proves this. It is quite likely that some of these very men who had listened to His blessed teaching in the Capernaum synagogue were among that number. But at the time of which our lesson treats they were unbelievers, so He continued to address them accordingly.

“It is the Spirit that quickeneth” (John 6:63).

The Lord here presses upon His critics what He had first said in verse 44. To believe on Him, to appropriate the saving value of His death, was not an act of the flesh: to do this, they must first be “drawn by the Father,” that is, be “quickeneth by the Spirit.” There must be life before there can be the activities of life. Believing on Christ is a manifestation of the Divine life already in the one that believes. The writer has no doubt at all that the words, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth,” refer to the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. John 6:63 is complementary to verse 21. In the former, “quickeneth” is referred to both God the Father, and God the Son; here, to God the Holy Spirit. Thus by linking the two passages together we learn that regeneration is the joint work of the three Persons in the Holy Trinity. So, in like manner, by linking together Ephesians 1:20, John 10:18 and Romans 8:11, we learn that each Person of the Trinity was active in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

“It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

This is indeed a searching word and one that greatly needs emphasizing today. The flesh “profiteth nothing.” The flesh has no part in the works of God. All fleshly activities amount to nothing where the regeneration of dead sinners is concerned. Neither the logical arguments advanced by the mind, hypnotic powers brought to bear upon the will, touching appeals made to the emotions, beautiful music and hearty singing to catch the ear, nor sensuous trappings to draw the eye — none of these are of the slightest avail in stirring dead sinners. It is not the choir, nor the preacher, but “the Spirit that quickeneth.” This is very distasteful to the natural man, because so humbling; that is why it is completely ignored in the

great majority of our modern evangelistic campaigns. What is urgently needed today is not mesmeric experts who have made a study of how to produce a religious “atmosphere,” nor religious showmen to make people laugh one minute and weep the next, but faithful preaching of God’s Word, with the saints on their faces before God, humbly praying that He may be pleased to send His quickening Spirit into their midst.

“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

This confirms our interpretation of the first part of the verse. Christ is speaking of regeneration, which was the one great need of those who were offended at His teaching. They could not discern spiritual things till they had spiritual life, and for that they must be “quickened” by the Spirit of God. First, He told them who did the quickening — “the Spirit”; now He states what the Spirit uses to bring about that quickening — the “words” of God. The Spirit is the Divine Agent; the Word is the Divine instrument. God begets “with the word of truth” (James 1:18). We are born again of incorruptible seed, “by the word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). We are made partakers of the Divine nature by God’s “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). And here in John 6:63 Christ explains how this is: the words of God are “spirit, and they are life” That is, they are spiritual, and employed by the Holy Spirit to impart life. Thus, we say again, The great need of today, as of every age, is the faithful preaching of God’s Word;

“not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).

What is needed is less anecdotal preaching, less rhetorical embellishment, less reliance upon logic, and more direct, plain, pointed, simple declaration and ex- position of the Word itself. Sinners will never be saved without this “the flesh profiteth *nothing*”!

“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” How Christ here maintained the balance of truth! “It is the Spirit that quickeneth” speaks of the Divine side. In connection with it man has

no part. There, the “flesh” is ruled out entirely. Are we, then, to fold our arms and act as though we had no obligations at all? Far from it. Christ guards against this by saying, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” This was addressed to *human responsibility*. These “words” are given to be believed; and we are under direct obligation to set to our seal that God is true. Let then the sinner read God’s Word; let him see himself mirrored in it. Let him take its searching message to himself; let him follow the light whithersoever it leads him; and if he be sincere, if he is truly seeking God, if he longs to be saved, the Holy Spirit shall quicken him by that same Word of life.

“But there are some of you that believe not” (John 6:64).

This affords further confirmation of what we have said above. Christ was addressing human responsibility. He was pressing upon His hearers their need of believing on Him. He was not deceived by outward appearances. They might pose as His disciples, they might seem to be very devoted to Him, but He knew that they had not “believed.” The remainder of the verse is a parenthetical statement made by John (under the inspiration of God) at the time he wrote the Gospel. “For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.” Very striking is this. It is one more of the many evidences furnished by this fourth Gospel, that Christ is none other than the Son of God.

“And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father” (John 6:65).

Here He repeats what He had said in verse 44. He is still addressing their responsibility. He presses upon them their moral inability. He affirms their need of Divine power working within them. It was very humbling, no doubt. It furnished proof that “the flesh profiteth nothing.” It shut them up to God. To the Father they must turn; from Him they must seek that drawing power, without which they would never come to Christ and be saved. Not only “would not” but *could not*. The language of Christ is unequivocal. It is not “no man will,” but “no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.” The will of the natural man has nothing to do with it. John 1:13 expressly declares that the new birth is “not of the will of the

flesh.” Contrary this may be to our ideas! distasteful to our minds and hearts; but it is *God’s* truth, nevertheless, and all the denials of men will never alter it one whit.

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66).

While the preceding verses contain words of Christ which were addressed to human responsibility, we must not overlook the fact that they also expressed the Divine side of things. The “drawing” of the Father is exercised according to His sovereign will. He denies it to none who sincerely seek; but the truth is, that the seeking itself, the desire for Christ, is the initial effect of this “drawing.” That all men do not seek Christ may be explained from two view points. From the human side the reason is that, men are so depraved they love the darkness and hate the light. From the Divine side, that any do seek Christ, is because God in His sovereign grace has put forth a power in them which overcomes the resistance of depravity. But God does not work thus in all. He is under no moral obligation so to do. Why should He make an enemy love Him? Why should He “draw” to Christ, one who wants to remain away? That He does so with particular individuals is according to His own eternal counsels and sovereign pleasure. And once this is pressed upon the natural man he is offended. It was so here: “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” What a contrast was this from what occurred at the beginning of that day! Then, the many had crossed the Sea and sought Him out; now, the many turned their backs upon Him: so unreliable and so fickle is human nature.

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” This verse is parallel with what we read of in Luke 4: “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman which was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian” (verses 25-27). Here Christ, in the synagogue of Nazareth, pressed upon His hearers how in the past God had most

evidently acted according to His mere sovereign pleasure. And what was the effect of this on those who heard? The very next verse tells us: "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath." And human nature has not changed. Let the sovereign rights of God be emphasized today, and people will be "filled with wrath"; not only the men of the world will be, but the respectable attenders of the modern synagogue. So it was here in our lesson: "From that time many of his disciples went back." From what time? From the time that Christ had declared, "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (verse 65). This was too much for them. They would not remain to hear any more. And mark it carefully, that those who left were "many of his disciples." Then let not the one who faithfully preaches the sovereignty of God today be surprised if he meets with a similar experience.

["Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?"  
\(John 6:67\).](#)

Christ desires no unwilling followers; so, on the departure of the "many disciples," He turns to the twelve and inquires if they also desire to leave Him. His question was a test, a challenge. Did they prefer to be found with the popular crowd, or would they remain with what was, outwardly, a failing cause? Their answer would evidence whether or not a Divine work of grace had been wrought in them.

"Will ye also go away?" The same testing question is still being put to those who profess to be the followers of Christ. As He sees some being carried along by the different winds of erroneous doctrines, now blowing in every direction; as He beholds others going back into the world, loving pleasure more than they love God; as He marks others offended by the faithful and searching ministry of His servants, He says to you and to me, "Will ye also go away?" O that Divine grace may enable us to stand and to withstand. O that we may be so attracted by the loveliness of His person that we shall gladly go forth "unto him, without the camp (the camp of Christianized Judaism) hearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:13).

“Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

A blessed reply was this. The wondrous miracles had attracted the others, but the teaching of Christ had repelled them. It was the very opposite with the apostles, for whom, as usual, Peter acted as spokesman. It was not the supernatural works, but the Divine words of the Lord Jesus which held them. Peter had, what the “many disciples who went back” had not — the hearing ear. Christ had said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (verse 63), and Peter believed and was assured of this: “Thou *hast* the *words* of eternal life” he confessed. “The words of Christ had sunk deep into his soul. He had felt their power. He was conscious of the blessing they had imparted to him” (C.E.S.). It is ever this which distinguishes a true Christian from the formal professor.

“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:69).

Notice carefully the order here: “We believe and are sure.” It is the Divinely appointed and unchanging order in connection with spiritual things, It supplies one out of a thousand illustrations that God’s thoughts and ways are different, radically different, always different, from ours. Whoever heard of believing in order to be sure? Man wants to make sure first before he is ready to believe. But God always reverses man’s order of things. It is impossible, utterly impossible, to be sure of Divine truth, or of any part thereof, until we have believed it. Other illustrations of this same principle may be adduced from Scripture. For example, the Psalmist said,

“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13).

This also is the very opposite of human philosophy. The natural man says, ‘Seeing is believing’; but the spiritual man believes in order to see. So, again, in Hebrews 11:3 we read, “Through faith we understand.” How many desire to understand the mystery of the Trinity or the doctrine of election, before they will believe it. They might live to be as old as Methuselah, and they would “understand” neither the one nor the other until they had faith in what God had

revealed thereon. It is through faith that we do understand any part of Divine truth. “We believe and are sure.” To sum up: assurance, vision, knowledge, are the fruits of “believing.” God rewards our faith by giving us assurance, discernment and understanding; but the unbelieving are left in the darkness of ignorance so far as spiritual things are concerned.

“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Certainty that Christ is “the Son of the living God” comes not by listening to the labored arguments of seminary professors, nor by studying books on Christian Evidences, but by believing what God has said about His Son in the Holy Scriptures. Peter was sure that Christ was the Son of God, because he had believed “the words of eternal life” which he had heard from His lips. It is indeed striking to note that in Matthew’s Gospel this confession is placed right after the apostles had seen Christ walking on the waters and after they had received Him into the ship (Matthew 14:33); for it is thus that Israel, in a coming day, will be brought to believe on Him (cf. Zechariah 12:10). But here in John’s Gospel, which treats of the family of God, this confession is evoked by the assurance which comes from believing His words. How beautifully this illustrates the opening verse of John’s Gospel, and how evident it is that God Himself has placed everything in these Gospels!

“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”  
(John 6:70, 71).

“Jesus answered them.” This was in reply to Peter’s avowal, “We believe and are sure.” Christ showed that He knew better than His disciple. It was the omniscience of the Lord Jesus displayed once more. He was not deceived by Judas, though it is evident that all the apostles were. Proof of this is found in the fact that when He said, “One of you shall betray me,” instead of them answering, Surely you refer to Judas, they asked, “Lord, is it I?” But from the beginning Christ knew the character of the one who should sell Him to His enemies. Yet not now will Christ openly identify him. What

we read of in verse 71 is the apostle's inspired comment, written years afterwards.

That Judas was never saved is clear from many considerations. Here in our text Christ is careful to except him from Peter's confession — "We believe." So, too, in John 13. After washing the feet of His disciples, which symbolized the removal of every defilement which hindered communion with Him, He said, "Ye are clean," but then He was careful to add, "but not all" (John 13:10), and then John supplies another explanatory comment — "for he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean" (verse 11). Again; the fact that Christ here calls him a "devil" — and this was six months before he betrayed Him — proves positively that he was not a child of God. Acts 1:25 — "Judas by transgression fell" — is sometimes appealed to in proof that he fell from grace. But the first part of the verse makes quite clear what it was from which Judas fell: it was "ministry and apostleship." This raises the question, Why was there a Judas in the apostolate? The Divine answer to our question is furnished in John 17:12, where Christ tells us plainly that "the son of perdition" was lost in order that "the Scriptures might be fulfilled." The reference was to Psalm 41:9 and similar passages. When that prophecy was uttered it seemed well-nigh incredible that the Friend of sinners should be betrayed by one intimate with Him. But no word of God can fall to the ground. It had been written that, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me," and the son of perdition was lost in order that this scripture might be accomplished. But why did God ordain this? Why should there be a Judas in the apostolate? Mysterious as this subject is, yet, a number of things seem clear. The following ends, at least, were accomplished: —

1. *It furnished an opportunity for Christ to display His perfections.* When the Son became incarnate, He declared, "Lo I come to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7), and this will of God for Him was written "in the volume of the book." Now in that book it was recorded that a familiar friend should lift up his heel against him. This was indeed a sore trial, yet was it part of the Divine will for God's Servant. How, then, does He act? John 6:70 answers: He deliberately "chose" one to be His apostle, whom He knew at the time was a "devil"! How this displays the

perfections of Christ! It was in full subjection to the Divine will, “written in the book,” that He thus acted. Even though it meant having Judas in closest association with Him for three years (and what must that have been to the Holy One of God!), though it meant that even when He retired from His carping critics to get alone with the twelve, there would then be a devil next to Him, He hesitated not. He bowed to God’s will and “chose” him!

2. *It provided an impartial witness to the moral excellency of Christ.* His Father, His forerunner, His saved apostles, bore testimony to His perfections; but lest it should be thought that these were ex parte witnesses, God saw to it that an enemy should also bear testimony. Here was a man that was “a devil”; a man who was in the closest possible touch with the life of Christ, both in public and in private; a man who would have seized eagerly on the slightest flaw, if it had been possible to find one; but it was not: “I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4), was the unsought testimony of an impartial witness!
3. *It gave occasion to uncover the awfulness of sin.* The fulness of redemption must bring to light the fulness of the wickedness of that for which atonement is to be made: only thus could we thoroughly see what is that terrible thing from which we are saved. And how could the heinousness of sin be more fittingly exposed at that time than by allowing a man to company with the Savior, to be inside the circle of greatest earthly privilege, and to be himself convinced of the innocency of that One who was to be the sacrificial victim; and yet, notwithstanding, for him to basely betray that One and sell Him into the hands of His enemies! Never was the vileness of sin more thoroughly uncovered.
4. *It supplies sinners with a solemn warning.* The example of Judas shows us how near a man may come to Christ and yet be lost. It shows us that outward nearness to Christ, external contact with the things of God, is not sufficient. It reveals the fact that a man may witness the most stupendous marvels, may hear the most spiritual teaching, may company with the most godly characters, and yet himself never be born again.

5. *It tells us we may expect to find hypocrites among the followers of Christ.* A hypocrite Judas certainly was. He was not a deceived soul, but an out and out impostor. He posed as a believer. He forsook the world and followed Christ. He went out as a preacher and heralded the Gospel (Matthew 10:4). He did not manifest any offense at the teaching of Christ, and did not follow those who turned back and walked no more with Him. Instead, he remained by the Savior's side right up to the last night of all. He even partook of the passover supper, and yet all the time, he was an hypocrite; and his hypocrisy was undetected by the eleven. And history repeats itself. There are still wolves in sheep's clothing.
6. *It shows us that a devil is to be expected among the servants of God.* It was thus when Christ was here on earth; it is so still. Scripture warns us plainly against "false prophets," and "false apostles" who are "the ministers of Satan." And the case of Judas gives point to these warnings. Whoever would have expected to find a "devil" among the twelve! Whoever would have dreamed of finding a Judas among the apostles chosen by Christ Himself! But there was. And this is a solemn warning to us to place confidence in no man.
7. *It affords one more illustration of how radically different are God's thoughts and ways from ours.* That God should appoint a "devil" to be one of the closest companions of the Savior; that He should have selected "the son of perdition" to be one of the favored twelve, seemed incredible. Yet so it was. And as we have sought to show above, God had good reasons for this selection; He had wise reasons for this appointment. Let this, then, serve to show us that, however mysterious may be God's ways, they are ever dictated by omniscience!

The following questions are to help the student prepare for the next chapter on John 7:1-13: —

1. What relation does verse 1 have to the rest of the lesson?
2. What do you know about the feast of tabernacles? verse 2. Look up Old Testament references.
3. Who are "His brethren" verse 3?
4. Why did His brethren make the request of verse 4?

5. To what was Christ referring in verses 6 and 8?
6. In view of verses 1 and 8, why did Christ go to the feast at all? verse 10.
7. What is the meaning of the last clause of verse 10?

# JOHN 7:1-13

## CHRIST AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Below we give a rough Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Jesus walked in Galilee: verse 1.
2. Time: immediately before the Feast of Tabernacles: verse 2.
3. The request of Christ's brethren: verses 3-5.
4. Christ's reply to them: verses 6-8.
5. Christ still in Galilee: verse 9.
6. Christ goes up to the Feast: verse 10.
7. The attitude of men toward Christ: verses 11-13.

John 7 begins a new section of this fourth Gospel. Our Lord's ministry in Galilee was now over, though He still remained there, because the Judeans sought to kill Him. The annual Feast of tabernacles was at hand, and His brethren were anxious for Christ to go up to Jerusalem, and there give a public display of His miraculous powers. To this request the Savior made a reply which at first glance appears enigmatical. He bids His brethren go up to the Feast, but excuses Himself on the ground that His time was not yet fully come. After their departure, He abode still in Galilee. But very shortly after, He, too, goes up to the Feast; as it were in secret. The Jews who wished to kill Him, sought but were unable to discover Him. Among the people He formed the principal subject of discussion, some of whom considered Him a good man, others regarding Him as a deceiver. And then, in verse 14 we are told, "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught." Such is a brief summary of the passage which is to be before us.

That our passage will present a number of real difficulties to the cursory reader is not to be denied, and perhaps the more diligent student may not be able to clear up all of them. The simplest and often the most effective way of studying a portion of God's Word is to draw up a list of questions upon it. This will insure a more

definite approach: it will save us from mere generalizations: it will reveal the particular points upon which we need to seek God's help.

Who are meant by "his brethren"? (verse 3) — brethren who did not "believe in him" (verse 5). To what did Christ refer when He said, "My time is not yet come" (verse 6)? Why did Christ refuse to go up to the Feast with His brethren (verse 8)? And why, after saying that His time was not yet come, did He go to the Feast at all (verse 10)? What is meant by "He went not openly, but as it were in secret" (verse 10)? If He went up to the Feast "as it were in secret," why did He, about the midst of the Feast, go into the temple, and teach (verse 14)? These are some of the more pertinent and important questions which will naturally occur to the inquiring mind.

It should be obvious that the central item in our passage is the Feast itself, 4 and in the scriptural significance of this Feast of tabernacles must be sought the solution of most of our difficulties here. It will be necessary, then, to compare carefully the leading scriptures which treat of this Feast, and then shall we be the better able to understand what is before us. Having made these preliminary remarks we shall now turn to our passage and offer an exposition of it according to the measure of light which God has been pleased to grant us upon it.

["After these things Jesus walked in Galilee" \(John 7:1\).](#)

The first three words intimate that a new section of the Gospel commences here — cf. John 6:1 and our comments thereon. "After these things" probably has a double reference. In its more general significance, it points back to the whole of His Galilean ministry, now ended. There is a peculiar and significant arrangement of the contents of the first seven chapters of John: a strange alternating between Judea and Galilee. In John 1 the scene is laid in Judea (see verse 28); but in John 2:1-12 Christ is seen in Galilee. In John 2:13 we are told that "Jesus went up to Jerusalem," and He remained in its vicinity till we reach John 4:3, where we are told, "He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee." Then, in verse 1, we read, "Jesus went up to Jerusalem," and He is viewed there to the end of the chapter. But in John 6:1 we are told, "After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee." And now in John 7 we are to see Him once more in Jerusalem.

But why this strange and repeated alternation? In the light of Matthew 4:15 — “Galilee *of the Gentiles*” — we would suggest two answers: First, this fourth Gospel, in a special manner, concerns the family of God, which is made up of Jew and Gentile; hence the emphasis here by our attention being directed, again and again, to both Judea and Galilee. But note that Judea always comes before Galilee: “To the Jew first” being the lesson taught. In the second place, if our references above be studied carefully, it will be seen that the passages treating of Galilee and what happened there, come in parenthetically; inasmuch as Jerusalem is both the geographical and moral center of the Gospel.

“After these things,” then, points back to the conclusion of His Galilean ministry: John 2:1-11; 4:43-54; 6:1-71. But we also regard these words as having a more restricted and specific reference to what is recorded at the close of chapter 6, particularly verse 66. “After these things” would thus point, more directly, to the forsaking of Christ by many of His Galilean disciples, following the miracles they had witnessed and the teaching they had heard.

“After these things Jesus walked (literally, “was walking”) in Galilee.” It appears as though the Lord was reluctant to leave Galilee, for it seems that He never returned there any more. It was useless to work any further miracles, and His teaching has been despised, nevertheless, His person He would still keep before them a little longer. Jesus walking in Galilee, rather than dwelling in privacy, suggests the thought of the continued public manifestation of Himself: let the reader compare John 1:36; John 6:19; John 10:23 and John 11:54 for the other references in this Gospel to Jesus “walking”, and he will find confirmation of what we have just said. Again, if John 7:1 be linked with John 6:66 (as the “after these things” suggests) the marvelous grace of the Savior will be evidenced. Many of His disciples went back and *walked no more* “with him.” Notwithstanding, He continued to “walk,” and that too, “in Galilee”!

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him” (John 7:1).

Let the reader turn back and consult our remarks on verse 15 concerning “the Jews.” It is indeed solemn to trace right through this fourth Gospel what is said about them. “The Jews” are not only to be distinguished from the Galileans, as being of Judea, but also from the common people of Judea. Note how in our present passage “the are distinguished from “the Jews”: see verses 11, 12, 13. “The Jews” were evidently the leaders, the religious leaders. Notice how in John 8:48 it is “the Jews” who say to Christ “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon.” It was “the Jews” who cast out of the synagogue the man born blind, whose eyes Christ had opened (John 9:22, 34). It was “the Jews” who took up stones to stone Christ (John 10:31). It was “the officers of the Jews” who “took Jesus, and bound him” (John 18:12). And it was through “fear of the Jews” that Joseph of Arimathaea came secretly to Pilate and begged the body of the Savior (John 19:38). And so here: it was because of the Jews, who sought to kill Him, that Jesus would not walk in Judea, but remained in Galilee. Christ here left us a perfect example. By His actions, He teaches us not to court danger, and unnecessarily expose ourselves before our enemies. This will be the more evident if we link this verse with John 11:53, 54:

“From that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness,” etc.

It will thus appear that our Lord used prudence and care to avoid persecution and danger till His time was fully come; so it is our duty to endeavor by all wise means and precautions to protect and preserve ourselves, that we may have opportunities for further service.

“Now the Jews’s feast of tabernacles was at hand” (John 7:2).

By comparing this verse with John 6:4 it will be seen that upwards of six months is spanned by John 6 to 7:1. John 6:4 says the Passover was nigh, and from Leviticus 23:5 we learn that this Feast was kept in the first month of the Jewish year: whereas Leviticus 23:34 tells us that the Feast of tabernacles was celebrated in the seventh month. How evident it is then that John was something

more than an historian. Surely it is plain that the Holy Spirit has recorded what He has in this fourth Gospel (as in the others) according to a principle of selection, and in consonance with a definite design.

“Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand.” As already intimated, it will be necessary for us to give careful attention to the leading scriptures of the Old Testament on the Feast of tabernacles, that we may ascertain its historical and typical significance, and thus be the better prepared to understand the details of the passage now before us.

Leviticus 23 reveals the fact that there were seven Feasts in Israel’s religious calendar, but there were three of these which were singled out as of special importance. This we gather from Deuteronomy 16:16, where it is recorded that Jehovah said to Israel, “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose *i.e.* in the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple; in the feast of unleavened bread inseparably connected with the passover, and in the feast of weeks *i.e.* pentecost, and in the feast of tabernacles.” We reserve a brief comment on the first two of these, until we have considered the third.

The first time the Feast of tabernacles is mentioned by name is in Leviticus 23, namely, in verses 34-36 and 39-44. As this passage is too long for us to quote here in full, we would request the reader to turn and read it through carefully before going farther. We give now a brief summary of its prominent features. First, the Feast began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (verse 34). Second, it was a “holy convocation,” when Israel was to offer “an offering made by fire unto the Lord” (verse 36). Third, it lasted for eight days (verse 39). Fourth, those who celebrated this Feast were to take “boughs of goodly trees” (verse 40). Fifth, they were to “rejoice before the Lord their God seven days” (verse 40). Sixth, they were to “dwell in booths” (verse 42). Seventh, the purpose of this was to memorialize the fact that “Jehovah made their fathers to dwell in booths, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt” (verse 43). In Numbers 29:12-40 we have a detailed record of the ritual or sacrificial requirements connected with this Feast.

Though Leviticus 23 is the first time the Feast of tabernacles is mentioned by name, there is one earlier reference to it, namely, in Exodus 23:16, where it is termed the Feast of Ingathering, Ex “which is the end of the year (i.e. of the sacred calendar of Feasts), when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field.” The Feast of tabernacles, then, was the grand Harvest Festival, when the Lord of the harvest was praised for all His temporal mercies. This one was the most joyous Feast of the year. It was not observed by Israel till after they had entered and settled in Canaan: their dwelling in booths at this Feast memorialized their wanderings in the wilderness.

The Old Testament records but two occasions when this Feast was ever observed by Israel in the past, and they are most significant. The first of these is found in 1 Kings 8, see verses 2, 11, 13, 62-66, and note particularly the “seventh month” in verse 2 and the “eighth day” in verse 66. This was in the days of Solomon at the completion and dedication of the Temple. In like manner, the antitypical Feast of tabernacles, will not be ushered in till the completion of the spiritual “temple,” which God is now building (Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5). The second account of Israel’s past celebration of this Feast is recorded in Nehemiah 8:13-18. The occasion was the settlement of the Jewish remnant in Palestine, after they had come up out of captivity.

We cannot offer here anything more than a very brief word on Deuteronomy 16:16. The three great Feasts which God required every male Israelite to observe annually in Jerusalem, were those of unleavened bread (inseparably connected with the passover), of weeks (or pentecost), and tabernacles. The first has already received its antitypical accomplishment at the Cross. The second began to receive its fulfillment on the day of pentecost (Acts 2), but was interrupted by the failure of the nation to repent (see Acts 3:1-21). The third looks forward to the future.

“Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand.” Someone has pointed out that in John 5, 6, and 7 there is a striking order followed in the typical suggestiveness of the contents of these chapters. In John 5 Israel may be seen, typically, as being delivered from the bondage of Egypt: this was adumbrated in the deliverance of the impotent man from lifelong suffering. In John 6 there is repeated

reference made to Israel *in the wilderness*, eating the manna. While here in John 7 Israel is viewed *in the land*, keeping the Feast of tabernacles.

“His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest” (John 7:3).

These “brethren” were the brothers of Christ according to the flesh: that is, they were sons of Mary too. That they were completely blind to His Divine glory is evident from the fact they here told Him what to do. Blind to His glory, they were therefore devoid of all spiritual discernment, and hence their reasoning was according to the carnal mind. But what did they mean by “Go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest”? The answer is to be found in the “also” and the “therefore” at the beginning of the verse — “His brethren therefore said unto him,” etc. The “therefore,” of course, looks back to something previous. What this is, we find in the closing verses of John 6. In the first part of that chapter we have recorded a wonderful “work” performed by the Lord. But in verse 66 we are told, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Now, said these brethren according to the flesh, do not waste any further efforts or time here, but go to Judea. They were evidently piqued at the reception which Christ had met with in Galilee. His work there seemed to amount to very little, why not, then, try Jerusalem, the headquarters of Judaism! Moreover, now was an opportune time: the Feast of tabernacles was at hand, and Jerusalem would be full.

“For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world” (verse 4).

Note the “if” here. There was evidently a slightly veiled taunt in these words. We take it that these brethren were really challenging Christ, and that the substance of their challenge was this: ‘If these works of yours are genuine miracles, why confine yourself to villages and small country-towns in Galilee, where the illiterate and unsophisticated habituate. Go up to the Capital, where people are better qualified to judge. Go up to the Feast, and there display your powers, and if they will stand the test of the public scrutiny of the

leaders, why, your disciples will gather around you, and your claims will be settled once for all.’ No doubt, these “brethren” really hoped that He would establish His claims, and in that event, as His near kinsmen, they would share the honors which would be heaped upon Him. But how insulting to our blessed Lord all this was! What indignities He suffered from those who were blind to His glory!

“If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.” How these words betrayed their hearts! They were men of the world: consequently, they adopted its ways, spoke its language, and employed its logic. “Show thyself to the world” meant, Accompany us to Jerusalem, work some startling miracle before the great crowds who will be assembled there; and thus, not only make yourself the center of attraction, but convince everybody you are the Messiah. Ah! how ignorant they were of the mind of God and the purpose of His Son’s mission! It was “the pride of life” (1 John 2:16) displaying itself. And how much of this same “pride of life” we see today, even among those who profess to be followers of that One whom the world crucified! What are the modern methods of evangelistic campaigns and Bible conferences — the devices resorted to to draw the crowds, the parading of the preacher’s photo, the self-advertising by the speakers — what are these, but the present-day expressions of “*Show thyself* to the world”!

“If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.” One other comment, an exegetical one, should be made on this before we pass on to the next verse. Here is a case in point where “the world” does not always signify the whole human race. When these brethren of Christ said, “Go show thyself to the world,” it is evident that they did not mean, ‘Display yourself before all mankind.’ No, here, as frequently in this Gospel, “the world” is merely a *general* term, signifying *all* classes of men.

“For neither did his brethren believe in him” (John 7:5).

How this illustrates the desperate hardness and depravity of human nature. Holy and perfect as Christ was, faultless and flawless as were His character and conduct, yet, even those who had been brought up with Him in the same house believed not in Him! It was bad enough that the nation at large believed not on Him, but the case of these “kinsmen” (Mark 3:21, margin) was even more excuseless.

How this demonstrates the imperative need of God's almighty regenerating grace! And how this exemplifies Christ's own teaching that "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him"! And how striking to note that the unbelief of His "brethren" was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy:

"I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto *my mother's children*" (Psalm 69:8).

"Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready" (John 7:6).

These words of Christ must be interpreted in the light of the immediate context. His brethren had said, "Go show thyself to the world." But His time to do this had not then come, nor has it yet arrived. Not then would He vindicate Himself by openly displaying His glory. This was the time of His humiliation. But how plainly His words here imply that there is a time coming when He will publicly reveal His majesty and glory. To this He referred when He said,

"And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

And what will be the effect of this on "the world"? Revelation 1:7 tells us: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." And solemn will be the accompaniments of this showing of Himself to the world. Then shall He say,

"But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27);

see, too, the last half of Revelation 19. How little, then, did these brethren realize the import of their request! Had He openly manifested Himself then before the Cross — it would have involved the perdition of the whole human race, for then there had been no atoning-blood under which sinners might shelter! Thankful must we ever be that He did not do what they asked. And how often we ask Him for things, which He in His Divine wisdom and grace denies

us! How true it is that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26)!

“Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready.” There was no “pride of life” in Christ. He demonstrated this in the great Temptation. All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them could not tempt Him. Instead of seeking to show Himself before the world, instead of advertising Himself, instead of endeavoring to attract attention, He frequently drew a veil over His works and sought to hide Himself: see Mark 1:36-38; Mark 7:17; Mark 7:36; Mark

8:26, etc. After He had been transfigured on the holy mount and His glory had appeared before the eyes of the three apostles, He bade them “that they should tell no man what things they had seen” (Mark 9:9). How truly did He make Himself of “no reputation”! But how different with these brethren. “Your time is alway ready,” He said. They were ever willing and wanting to win the applause of men, and make themselves popular with the world.

“The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7).

How this helps us to fix the meaning of the last clause of the previous verse. “Your time is alway ready” meant, as we have said, Your time to display yourself before the world, in order to court its smiles, is ever to hand. But how solemn is the reason Christ here gives for this! It was because they had not cast in their lot with this One who was “despised and rejected of men.” Because of this, the world would not hate them. And why? Because they were of the world. Contrariwise, the world did hate Christ. It hated Christ because He testified of it (not “against” it!), that its works were evil. The holiness of His life condemned the worldliness of theirs. And right here is a solemn and searching test for those who profess to be His followers today. Dear reader, if you are popular with the world, that is indeed a solemn sign, an evil omen. The world has not changed. It still hates those whose lives condemn theirs. Listen to the words of Christ to His apostles,

“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” (John 15:19).

Here our Lord tells us plainly that the world hates those who are truly His. This, then, is a searching test: does the world “hate” you?

“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” (John 7:8, 9).

The meaning of these verses is really very simple. Christ plainly qualified Himself. He did not say that He would not go up to the Feast; what He said was, He would not go then — His time to go had not “yet come.” “My time” must not be confounded with “Mine hour” which He used when referring to His approaching death. The simple force, then, of these verses is that Christ declined to go up to the Feast *with His brethren*.

“But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast” (John 7:10).

How tragic is this. How it reveals the hearts of these “brethren.” They left Christ for the Feast! They preferred a religious festival for fellowship with the Christ of God. And how often we witness the same thing today. What zeal there is for religious performances, for forms and ceremonies, and how little heart for Christ Himself.

“But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret” (John 7:10).

The first part of this verse supplies another reason why He would not accompany His brethren to the Feast, as well as explains the somewhat ambiguous “as it were in secret.” The general method of travel in those days, and especially at festival seasons, was to form caravans, and join together in considerable companies (cf. Luke 2:44). And when such a company reached Jerusalem, naturally it became known generally. It was, therefore, to avoid such publicity that our Lord waited till His brethren had gone, and then He went up to the Feast, “not openly, (R.V. publicly)”, but as it were in secret,” i.e., in private. “But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast.” the words we have placed in italics are not so much a time-mark as a word of explanation. The “when” has the force of *because* as in John 4:1; 6:12; 6:16, etc.

“Then went he also up unto the feast.” This simple sentence gives us a striking revelation of our Lord’s perfections. In order to appreciate what we have here it is necessary to go back to the first verse of the chapter, where we are told, “Jesus walked in Galilee, for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.” Why is it that the Holy Spirit has begun the chapter thus? The central incident in John 7 is Christ in Jerusalem at the Feast of tabernacles. Why, then, introduce the incident in this peculiar way? Ah! the Holy Spirit ever had the glory of Christ in view. Because the Jews “sought to kill him” He “walked in Galilee.” And therein, as pointed out, He left us an example not to needlessly expose ourselves to danger. But now in verse 10 we find that He did go to Judea, yes to Jerusalem itself. Why was this? We have to turn back to Deuteronomy 16:16 for our answer. There we read,

“Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.”

According to the flesh Christ was an Israelite, and “made under the law” (Galatians 4:4). Therefore, did He, in perfect submission to the will of His Father, go up to Jerusalem to keep the feast. In the volume of the book it was “written of him,” and even though the Jews “sought to kill him,” He promptly obeyed the written Word! And here, too, He has left us an example. On the one hand, danger should not be courted by us; on the other, when the Word of God plainly bids us follow a certain line of conduct, we are to do so, no matter what the consequences.

“Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And 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. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews” (John 7:11-13).

Mark what a strange variety of opinions there were concerning Christ even at the beginning! In the light of this passage the differences and divergencies of religious beliefs today ought not to surprise us. As said the late Bishop Ryle, “They are but the modern

symptoms of an ancient disease.” Christ Himself distinctly affirmed, “Think not that I am come to send peace.” Whenever God’s truth is faithfully proclaimed, opposition will be encountered and strife stirred up. The fault is not in God’s truth, but in human nature. As the sun shines on the swamp it will call forth malaria: but the fault is not in the sun, but in the ground. The very same rays call forth fertility from the grainfields. So the truth of God will yield spiritual fruit from a believing heart, but from the carnal mind it will evoke endless cavil and blasphemy. Some thought Christ a good man; others regarded Him as a deceiver: sufficient for the disciple to be as His Master.

“Some said, he is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people” (John 7:12).

“The Lord might bring blessing out of it, but they were *reasoning* and *discussing*. In another place He asks His disciples, ‘Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?’ They tell Him, ‘Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, one of the prophets.’ It was all discussion. But when Peter replies, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ He tells him, ‘Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven’. There was *personal recognition of Himself*, and where there is that, there is no *discussion*. Discussing Him as subject-matter in their minds, they had not submitted to the righteousness of God. Where people’s minds are at work discussing the right and the wrong, there is not the mind of the new-born babe; they are not receiving, but judging” (J.N.D.).

“Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews” (John 7:13).

What a solemn warning to us is this! What an awful thing is the fear of man! How often it has silenced faithful witness for Christ! It is written, “The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). This is still true.

Let us pray then for holy boldness that we may testify faithfully for an absent Savior before a world that cast Him out.

The following questions on our next portion may help the student:

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1. Wherein is verse 15 being repeated today?
2. Why did Christ speak of His “doctrine” rather than doctrines, verse 16?
3. What is the relation of verse 17 to the context?
4. Wherein does verse 18 help us to carry out 1 John 4:1?
5. What is the difference between “the law of Moses” (verse 23) and “the law of God” (Romans 7:22, 25)?
6. To what did the speakers refer in the second half of verse 27 — cf. verse 42?
7. What comforting truth is illustrated in verse 30?

# JOHN 7:14-31

## CHRIST TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE

Below is an outline Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

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1. Christ in the Temple, teaching: verse 14.
2. The Jews marvelling and Christ's answer: verses 15-19.
3. The people's question and Christ's response: verses 20-24.
4. The inquiry of those of Jerusalem: verses 25-27.
5. The response of Christ: verses 28, 29.
6. The futile attempt to apprehend Christ: verse 30.
7. The attitude of the common people: verse 31.

In the last chapter we discussed the first thirteen verses of John 7, from which we learned that notwithstanding "the Jews" (Judean leaders) sought to kill Him (verse 1), Christ, nevertheless, went up to Jerusalem to the Feast of tabernacles (verse 10). We pointed out how this manifested the perfections of the Lord Jesus, inasmuch as it demonstrated His submission to the will and His obedience to the word of His Father. Our present chapter records an important incident which transpired during the midst of the Feast. The Savior entered the Temple, and, refusing to be intimidated by those who sought His life, boldly taught those who were there assembled.

"Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught" (John 7:14).

Twice previously has "the temple" been mentioned in this Gospel. In John 2 we behold Christ as the Vindicator of the Father's house, cleansing the Temple. In verse 14 we read how Christ found in the temple the impotent man whom He had healed. But here in John 7, for the tint time, we find our Lord teaching in the Temple.

The Holy Spirit has not seen well to record the details of what it was that our Lord "taught" on this significant occasion, but He intimates that the Savior must have delivered a discourse of unusual weight. For in the very next verse we learn that even His enemies, "the Jews," *marvelled* at it. In keeping with His usual custom, we doubt

not that He took advantage of the occasion to speak at length upon the different aspects and relations of the Feast itself. Most probably He linked together the various Old Testament scriptures which treat of the Feast, and brought out of them things which His hearers had never suspected were in them. And then there would be a searching application of the Word made to the consciences and hearts of those who listened.

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (John 7:15).

“These words undoubtedly refer to our Lord’s great acquaintance with the Scriptures, and the judicious and masterly manner in which He taught the people out of them, with far greater majesty and nobler eloquence than the scribes could attain by a learned education.” (Dr. Philip Doddridge).

But how their very speech betrayed these Jews! How this exclamation of theirs exposed the state of their hearts! It was not their consciences which were exercised, but their curiosity that was aroused. It was not the claims of God they were occupied with, but the schools of men. It was not the discourse itself they were pondering, but the manner of its delivery that engaged their attention.

“How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” How like the spirit which is abroad today! How many there are in the educational and religious world who suppose it is impossible for man to expound the Scriptures gracefully and to the edification of his hearers unless, forsooth, he has first been trained in some college or seminary! Education is an altar which is now thronged by a multitude of idolatrous worshippers. That, no doubt, is one reason why God’s curse has fallen on almost all our seats of learning. He is jealous of His glory, and anything which enters into competition with Himself He blights and withers. An unholy valuation of human learning, which supplants humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit is, perhaps, the chief reason why God’s presence and blessing have long since departed from the vast majority of our centers of Christian education. And in the judgment of the writer, there is an immediate and grave danger that we may shortly witness the same tragedy in connection with our Bible Schools and Bible Institutes.

If young men are taught, even though indirectly and by way of implication, that they cannot and must not expect to become able ministers of God's Word unless they first take a course in one of the Bible Institutes, then the sooner all such institutions are shut down the better both for them and the cause of God. If such views are disseminated, if a course in some Bible School is advocated in preference to personal waiting upon God and the daily searching of the Scriptures in private, then God will blast these schools as surely as He did the seminaries and universities. And such an event is not so far beyond the bounds of probability as some may suppose. Already there are not wanting signs to show that "Ichabod" has been written over some of them. One of the principle Bible training schools in England closed down some years ago; and the fact that one of the leading Institutes in this country is constantly sending out urgent appeals for financial help is conclusive evidence that it is now being run in the energy of the flesh.

["Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" \(John 7:16\).](#)

Let every young man who reads these lines ponder carefully this sentence from Christ. If he is fully assured that he has received a call from God to devote his life to the Lord's service, and is now exercised as to how he may become equipped for such service, let him prayerfully meditate upon these words of the Savior. Let him remember that Christ is here speaking not from the standpoint of His essential glory, not as a member of the Godhead, but as the Son of God incarnate, that is, as the Servant of Jehovah. Let him turn to John 8:28 and compare its closing sentence: "As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." It was in no human schools He had learned to teach so that men marvelled. This discourse He had delivered originated not in His own mind. His doctrine came from the One who sent Him.

It was the same with the apostle Paul. Hear him as he says to the Galatians,

["But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of](#)

man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (John 1:11, 12).

And these things, dear brethren, are recorded for our learning. No one has to take a course in any Bible School in order to gain a knowledge and insight of the Scriptures. The man most used of God last century — Mr. C.

Spurgeon — was a graduate of no Bible Institute! We do not say that God has not used the Bible schools to help many who have gone there; we do not say there may not be such which He is so using today. But what we do say is, that such schools are not an imperative necessity. You have the same Bible to hand that they have; and you have the same Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. God may be pleased to use human instruments in instructing and enlightening you, or He may give you the far greater honor and privilege of teaching you directly. That is for you to ascertain. Your first duty is to humbly and diligently look to HIM, wait on Him for guidance, seek His will, and the sure promise is, “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psalm 25:9).

“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” These words were spoken by Christ to correct the Jews, who were unable to account for the wondrous words which fell from His lips. He would assure them that His “doctrine” had been taught Him by no man, nor had He invented it. “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” How zealous He was for the Father’s honor! How jealously He guarded the Father’s glory! Let every servant of God learn from this blessed One who was “meek and lowly in heart.” Whenever people praise you for some message of help, fail not to disclaim all credit, and remind your God — dishonoring admirers that the “doctrine” is not yours, but His that sent you.

“My doctrine is not mine.” Observe that Christ does not say “My doctrines are not mine,” but “My doctrine.” The word “doctrine” means “teaching,” and the teaching (truth) of God is one correlated and complete whole. In writing to Timothy, Paul said, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine” (not doctrines — 1 Timothy 4:6). And again he wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine” (2 Timothy 3:16). In striking contrast from this, Scripture speaks of “the doctrines of men”

(Colossians 2:22); “strange doctrines” (Hebrews 13:9); and “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). Here the word is pluralized because there is no unity or harmony about the teachings of men or the teachings of demons. They are diverse and conflicting. But God’s truth is indivisible and harmonious.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17).

The wording of this verse in the A.V. leaves something to be desired; we give, therefore, the translation found in Bagster’s Interlinear: <sup>16</sup> “If any one desire his will to practice, he shall know concerning the teaching whether from God it is, or I from myself speak.” The Greek word here rendered “desire” signifies no fleeting impression or impulse, but a deeply rooted determination. The connection between this verse and the one preceding is as follows: “What you have just heard from My lips is no invention of Mine, but instead, it proceedeth from Him that sent Me. Now if you really wish to test this and prove it for yourselves you must take care to preserve an honest mind and cultivate a heart that yields itself unquestioningly to God’s truth.”

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” In this declaration our Lord laid down a principle of supreme practical importance. He informs us how certainty may be arrived at in connection with the things of God. He tells us how spiritual discernment and assurance are to be obtained. The fundamental condition for obtaining spiritual knowledge is a genuine heart-desire to carry out the revealed will of God in our lives. Wherever the heart is right God gives the capacity to apprehend His truth. If the heart be not right, wherein would be the value of knowing God’s truth? God will not grant light on His Word unless we are truly anxious to walk according to that light. If the motive of the investigator be pure, then he will obtain an assurance that the teaching of Scripture is “of God” that will be far more convincing and conclusive than a hundred logical arguments.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” How this word *rebuked*,

again, these worldly-minded Jews; and how it reverses the judgment of many of our moderns! One does not have to enter a seminary or a Bible Institute and take a course in Christian Apologetics in order to obtain assurance that the Bible is inspired, or in order to learn how to interpret it. Spiritual intelligence comes not through the intellect, but via the heart: it is acquired not by force of reasoning, but by the exercise of faith. In Hebrews 11:3 we read, “Through faith we understand,” and faith cometh not by schooling but by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God! Thousands of years ago one of Israel’s prophets was moved by the Holy Spirit to write,

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know THE LORD”  
(Hosea 6:3).

“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” (John 7:18).

Christ here appealed to the manner and purpose of His teaching, to show that He was no impostor. He that speaketh of, or better from, himself, means, he whose message originates with himself, rather than God. Such an one seeketh *his own* glory. That is to say, he attracts attention to himself: he aims at his own honor and aggrandizement. On the other hand, the one who seeks the glory of Him that sent him, the same is “true” or genuine (cf. “true” in John 6:32 and 15:1), *i.e.* a genuine servant of God. And of such, Christ added, “and no unrighteousness is in him.” Interpreting this in the light of the context (namely, verses 12 and 15), its evident meaning is, The one who seeks God’s glory is no impostor.

“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 a searching word is this for every servant of God today! How it condemns that spirit of self-exaltation which at times, alas, is found (we fear) in all of us. The Pharisees sought “the praise of men,” and they have had many successors. But how different was it with the apostle Paul, who wrote,

“I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

And again, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8). And what an important word does this eighteenth verse of John 7 contain for those who sit under the ministry of the professed servants of God. Here is one test by which we may discover whether the preacher has been called of God to the ministry, or whether he ran without being sent. Does he magnify himself or his Lord? Does he seek his own glory, or the glory of God? Does he speak about himself or about Christ? Can he truthfully say with the apostle, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5)? Is the general trend of his ministry, Behold me, or Behold the church, or Behold the Lamb of God?

“Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?” (John 7:19).

Here Christ completely turns the tables upon them. They were saying that He was unlettered, and now He charges them with having the letter of the Law, but failing to render obedience to it. They professed to be the disciples of Moses, and yet there they were with murder in their hearts, because He had healed a man on the Sabbath. He had just declared there was no unrighteousness in Himself; now He uncovered the unrighteousness which was in them, for they stood ready to break the sixth commandment in the Decalogue. His question, “Why go ye about to kill me?” is very solemn. It was a word of more than local application. Where there is no heart for the truth, there is always an heart against it. And where there is enmity against the truth itself there is hatred of those who faithfully proclaim it. No one who is in anywise acquainted with the history of the last two thousand years can doubt that. And it is due alone to God’s grace and restraining power that His servants do not now share the experiences of Stephen, and Paul, and thousands of the saints who were “faithful unto death” during the Middle Ages. Nor will it be long before the Divine restraint, which now holds Satan in leash and which is curbing the passions of God’s enemies, shall be removed. Read through the prophecies of the Revelation and mark the awful sufferings which godly Jews will yet endure. Moreover, who can say how soon what is now transpiring in Russia may not become general and universal!

“The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?” (John 7:20).

“The people” evidently refers to the miscellaneous company of Israelites in the Temple courts. At that season they came from all parts of Palestine up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast. Many of them were ignorant of the fact that the Judean leaders had designs upon the life of Christ; and when He said to the Jews (of verse 15) “Why go ye about to kill me?” (verse 19, and cf. verse 1), these “people” deemed our Lord insane, and said “Thou hast a demon,” for insanity is often one of the marks of demoniacal possession. This fearful blasphemy not only exposed their blindness to the glory of Christ, but also demonstrated the desperate evil of their hearts. To what awful indignities and insults did our blessed Lord submit in becoming incarnate! “Thou hast a demon:” is such an aspersion ever cast on thee, fellow-Christian? Then remember that thy Lord before thee was similarly reviled: sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel” (John 7:21).

Christ ignored the horrible charge of “the people,” and continued to address Himself to “the Jews.” And herein He has left us a blessed example. It is to be noted that in the passage where we are told, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps,” the Holy Spirit has immediately followed this with,

“who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again” (1 Peter 2:22, 23).

What a beautiful illustration John 7 gives of this! When He was reviled, He “reviled not again.” He made no answer to their blasphemous declamation. O that Divine grace may enable us to “follow his steps.” When Christ said to the Jews, “I have done one work, and ye all marvel,” He was referring to what is recorded in John 5:1-16.

“Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day

circumcise a man. 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?" (John 7:22, 23).

Our Lord continued to point out how unreasonable was their criticism of Himself for healing the impotent man on the Sabbath day. He reminds them that circumcision was performed on the Sabbath; why then should they complain because He had made a poor sufferer whole on that day! By this argument Christ teaches us that works of necessity and works of mercy may be legitimately performed on the Sabbath. Circumcision was a work of necessity if the Law of Moses was to be observed, for if the infant reached its eighth day on the Sabbath, it was then he must be circumcised. The healing of the impotent man was a work of mercy. Thus are we permitted to engage in both works of necessity and works of mercy on the holy Sabbath.

It is to be observed that Christ here refers to circumcision as belonging to "the law of *Moses*." For a right understanding of the teaching of Scripture concerning the Law it is of first importance that we distinguish sharply between "the law of God" and "the law of Moses." The Law of God is found in the ten commandments which Jehovah Himself wrote on the two tables of stone, thereby intimating that they were of lasting duration. This is what has been rightly termed the moral Law, inasmuch as the Decalogue (the ten commandments) enunciates a rule of conduct. The moral Law has no dispensational limitations, but is lastingly binding on every member of the human race. It was given not as a means of salvation, but as expressing the obligations of every human creature to the great Creator. The "law of Moses" consists of the moral, social, and ceremonial laws which God gave to Moses after the ten commandments. The Law of Moses included the ten commandments as we learn from Deuteronomy 5.

In one sense the Law of Moses is wider than "the law of God," inasmuch as it contains far more than the Ten Commandments. In another sense, it is narrower, inasmuch as "the law of Moses" is binding only upon Israelites and Gentile proselytes; whereas "the law of God" is binding on Jews and Gentiles alike. [7](#) Christ dearly

observes this distinction by referring to circumcision as belonging not to “the law of God,” but as being an essential part of “the law of Moses” which related only to Israel.

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

The connection between this verse and the preceding ones is dear. Christ had been vindicating His act of healing the impotent man on the Sabbath day. To His superficial critics it might have seemed a breach of the Sabbatic law; but in reality it was not so. Their judgment was hasty and partial. They were looking for something they might condemn, and so seized upon this. But their verdict, as is usually the case when hurried and prejudiced, was altogether erroneous. Therefore, did our Lord bid them; “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” He exhorted them to be fair; to take into account all the circumstances; to weigh all that God’s Word revealed about the Sabbath. “In it thou shalt not do any work,” was not to be taken absolutely: other scriptures plainly modified it. The ministrations of the priests in the temple on the Sabbath, and the circumcising of the child on that day when the Law required it, were cases in point. But the Jews had overlooked or ignored these. They had judged by appearances. They had not considered the incident according to its merits, nor in the light of the general tenor of Scripture. Hence, their judgment was unrighteous, because unfair and false.

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” This is a word which each of us much need to take to heart. Most of us fail at this point; fail in one of two directions. Some are prone to form too good an opinion of people. They are easily deceived by an air of piety. The mere fact that a man professes to be a Christian, does not prove that he is one. That he is sound in his morals and a regular attender of religious services, is no sure index to the state of his heart. Remember that all is not gold that glitters. On the other hand, some are too critical and harsh in their judgment. We must not make a man an offender for a word. In many things we all offend.

“There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

The evil nature, inherited from Adam, remains in every Christian to the end of his earthly course. And too, God bestows more grace on one than He does on another. There is real danger to some of us lest, forgetting the frailties and infirmities of our fellows, we regard certain Christians as unbelievers. Even a nugget of gold has been known to be covered with dust. It is highly probable that all of us who reach heaven will receive surprises there. Some whom we expected to meet will be absent, and some we never expected to see will be there. Let us seek grace to heed this timely word of our Lord's: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

"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?" (John 7:25, 26).

In this chapter one party after another stands exposed. The Light was shining and it revealed the hidden things of darkness. First, the "brethren" of Christ (verses 3-5) are exhibited as men of the world, unbelievers. Next, "the Jews" (the Judean leaders) display their carnality (verse 15). Then, the miscellaneous crowd, "the people" (verse 20) make manifest their hearts. Now the regular inhabitants of Jerusalem come before us. They, too, make bare their spiritual condition. In sheltering behind "the rulers" they showed what little anxiety they had to discover for themselves whether or not Christ was preaching the truth of God. Verily, "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The common people were no better than the rulers; the Lord's brethren no more believed on Him than did the Jews; the inhabitants of Jerusalem had no more heart for Christ than they of the provinces. How plain it was, then, that no man would come to Christ except he had been drawn of the Father! It is so still. One class is just as much opposed to the Gospel as any other. Human nature is the same the world over. It is nothing but the distinguishing grace of God that ever makes one to differ from another.

"Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is" (John 7:27).

What pride of heart these words evidence! These men of Jerusalem deemed themselves wiser than their credulous rulers. The religious leaders might stand in some doubt, but they knew whence Christ was. Evidently they were well acquainted with His early life in Nazareth. Supposing that Joseph was His father, they were satisfied that He was merely a man: “We know *this man*” indicates plainly the trend of their thoughts.

“But when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.” This sentence needs to be pondered with verse 42 before us. From Matthew 2:4, 5 it is also plain that it was well known at the time that the Messiah should first appear in Bethlehem. What, then, did these people mean when they said, “When Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is”? With Dr. Doddridge, we regard this statement as an expression of the Jewish belief that the Messiah would be supernaturally born, *i.e.* of a virgin, as Isaiah 7:14 declared.

“Then cried Jesus 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” (John 7:28).

It appears to the writer that in the first part of this utterance the Lord was speaking ironically. Some of them who lived in Jerusalem had declared, “we know this man whence he is.” Here Christ takes up their words and refutes them. “Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am,” such was their idle boast; but, continues the Savior, “I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye *know not*.” So they did not know whence He was. When Christ here declared of the Father, “He that sent me is true,” He looked back, no doubt, to the Old Testament Scriptures. God had been “true” to His promises and predictions, many of which had already been fulfilled, and others were even then in course of fulfillment; yea, their very rejection of His Son evidenced the Father’s veracity.

“But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me” (John 7:29).

It was because Christ knew the Father, and was from Him, that He could reveal Him; for it is by the Son, and by Him alone, that the Father is made known.

“No man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

None cometh unto the Father but by Christ; and none knoweth the Father but by Him.

“Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 7:30).

This verse sets forth a truth which should be of great comfort to God’s people, and indeed it is so, when received by unquestioning faith. We find here a striking example of the restraining hand of God upon His enemies. Their purpose was to apprehend Christ. They sought to take Him, yet not a hand was laid upon Him! They thirsted for His blood, and were determined to kill Him; yet by an invisible restraint from above, they were powerless to do so. How blessed, then, to know that everything is under the immediate control of God. Not a hair of our heads can be touched without His permission. The demon-possessed Saul might hurl his javelin at David, but hurling it and killing him were two different things. Daniel might be cast into the den of lions, but as his time to die had not then come, their mouths were mysteriously sealed. The three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace, but of what avail were the flames against those protected by Jehovah?

“Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.” How this evidences the invincibility of God’s eternal decrees!

“There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord” (Proverbs 21:30).

God had decreed that the Savior should be betrayed by a familiar friend, and sold for thirty pieces of silver. How, then, was it possible for these men to seize Him? They could no more arrest Christ than they could stop the sun from shining.

“There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:21).

What an illustration of this is furnished by the incident before us!

“No man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.” Not until the sixty-ninth “week” of Daniel 9:24 had run its courses could Messiah the Prince be “cut off.” All the hatred of men and all the enmity of Satan and his hosts could not hasten Christ’s appointed death. Until God’s foreordained hour smack, and the incarnate Son bowed to His Father’s good pleasure, He was immortal. And blessed be God, it is our privilege to be assured that the hand of death cannot strike us down before God’s predestined “hour” arrives for us to go hence. The enemy may war against us, and he may be permitted to strike our bodies; but shorten our lives he cannot, anymore than he could Job’s. A frightful epidemic of disease may visit the neighborhood in which I live, but I am immune till God suffers me to be affected. Unless it is His will for me to be sick or to die, no matter how the epidemic may rage, nor how many of those around me may fall victims to it, it cannot harm me. “I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust.” His reassuring voice answers me:

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it *shall not come nigh thee*” (Psalm 91:2, 6, 7).

Should any be inclined to think we have expressed ourselves too strongly, we ask them to ponder the following scriptures: “Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?” that is, strictly numbered (Job 7:1 ). “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.... If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my *appointed time* will I wait, till my change come” (Job 14:5, 14).

“No man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.” How this brings out the fact that all of Christ’s sufferings were undergone *voluntarily*. He did not go to the Cross because He was

unable to escape it; nor did He die because He could not prevent it. Far, far from it. Had He so pleased, He could have smitten down these men with a single word from His mouth. But even that was not necessary. They were prevented from touching Him without so much as a single word being spoken!

“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?” (John 7:31).

Whether or not this was a saving faith it is rather difficult to ascertain. Personally, we do not think it was. Bather do we regard this verse as parallel with John 2:23:

“Now 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 that theirs was not a saving faith is evident from what follows: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all.” So here, the remainder of verse 31 seems to argue against a saving faith. “When Christ cometh,” intimates that they did not really regard the Lord Jesus as the Messiah himself. And their closing words, ‘Will he do more miracles than these which this (fellow) hath done?’ shows what a derogatory conception they had of the incarnate Son of God.

The following questions bear upon our next chapter: John 7:32-53:

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1. What is there in verse 34 which unmistakably brings out the Deity of Christ?
2. What does verse 35 go to prove?
3. Does verse 38 describe your spiritual experience? If not, why?
4. What solemn warning is conveyed by verses 41, 42?
5. What do verses 50, 51 go to show?
6. Were the Pharisees correct in verse 52?
7. What is there in this passage which magnifies Christ as “the Word”?

# JOHN 7:32-53

## CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE (CONCLUDED)

The following is a general Outline of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The Pharisees' attempt to apprehend Christ: verse 32.
2. Christ's words to their officers: verses 33, 34.
3. The mystification of the Jews: verses 35, 36.
4. Christ's words on the last day of the Feast: verses 37-39.
5. The divided opinion of the common people: verses 40-44.
6. The confession of the officers: verses 45, 46.
7. The conference of the Pharisees broken up by Nicodemus: verses 47-53.

The passage for our present consideration continues and completes the one that was before us in our last lesson. It views our Lord still in the Temple, and supplies additional evidences of His absolute Deity. It also affords further proofs of the desperate wickedness of the human heart. There is a strange mingling of the lights and the shadows. First, the Pharisees send officers to arrest Christ, and then we find these returning to their masters and confessing that never man spake as He did. On the one hand, we hear of Christ ministering blessing to the thirsty souls who come unto Him and drink; on the other, we learn of there being a division among the people because of Him. The Sanhedrin sit in judgment upon Christ, and yet one of their own number, Nicodemus, is found rebuking them.

Before examining in detail the dosing verses of John 7 this will be the best place, perhaps, to call attention (though very briefly) to the significant order of truth found in John 5, 6, and 7. This may be seen in two different directions: First, concerning Christ Himself; second, concerning His people. In John 5 Christ is seen disclosing His Divine attributes, His essential perfections. In John 6 He is viewed in His humiliation, as the One come down from heaven, and who was to "give his life" for the world. But here in John 7, He says, "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me" (verse 33), and speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was

subsequent upon His glorification (verse 39). So, too, there is a similar progressive unfolding of truth in connection with the believer. In John 5 he is viewed as “quickenened” (verse 21). In John 6 we see the result of this: he comes to Christ and is saved. Now, in John 7, we hear of “rivers of living water” flowing from him to others!

“The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him” (John 7:32).

Things began to move swiftly. An interval of but six months divides between the time contemplated in our lesson and the actual crucifixion of Christ. The shadows commence to fall more thickly and darkly across His path. The opposition of His enemies is more definite and relentless. The religious leaders were incensed: their intelligence had been called into question (verse 26), and they were losing their hold over many of the people (verse 31). When these tidings reached the ears of the Pharisees and chief priests, they sent out officers to arrest the Savior.

“Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me” (John 7:33).

This was tantamount to saying, My presence here is a source of annoyance to your masters, but not for long will this be continued. But our Lord did not forget to remind these officers that He was complete master of the situation. None could remove Him until His work was finished: “Yet a little while am I with you.” True that little while spanned only six months, but until these had run their course He would be with them, and no power on earth could prevent it; no power either human or satanic could shorten that little while by so much as a single day or hour. And when that little while had expired He would “go.” He would return to His Father in heaven. Equally powerless would they be to prevent this. Of His own self He would lay down His life, and of His own self would He take it again.

“Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.” How solemnly these words apply to our own age! Christ is now here in the Person of the Holy Spirit. But not forever is the Holy Spirit to remain in the world. When the

fulness of the Gentiles be come in, then shall the Holy Spirit return to the One that sent Him. And how many indications there are that this is not far distant! Verily, we are justified in saying to sinners, “*Yet a little while*” will the Holy Spirit be “with you” and then He will “go unto him” that sent Him. Then resist Him no longer: “*Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*”

“Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34).

This, no doubt, received its first fulfillment immediately after our Lord had risen from the dead. When “some of the watch” came to Jerusalem and made known to the chief priests that Christ had risen, that the sepulcher was empty, we may be sure that a diligent search was made for Him. But never again did any of them set eyes upon Him — the next time they shall behold Him will be at the Great White Throne. Whither He had gone they could not come, for “Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” And how tragically have these words of Christ received a continual verification in connection with Israel all through the centuries. In vain have the Jews sought their Messiah: in vain, because there is a veil over their hearts even as they read their own Scriptures (2 Corinthians 3:15).

“Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34).

These words also have a solemn message for unsaved Gentiles living today. In applying the previous verse to our own times we pointed out how that the words, “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me” find their fulfillment in the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the world today, a presence so soon to be removed. And once He is removed, once the Spirit of Christ returns to heaven, He will be sought in vain. “*Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me*” will receive a most solemn verification in a soon — coming day. This is very clear from Proverbs 1:24-28: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind;

when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, *but I will not answer*; they shall seek me early, *but they shall not find me.*” Nor does this solemn passage stand alone:

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door” (Luke 13:24, 25).

In view of these solemn warnings let every unsaved reader heed promptly that imperative word in Isaiah 55:6:

“Seek ye the Lord *while he may be found*, call ye upon him *while he is near.*”

“And where I am, thither ye cannot come.” How this brings out the Deity of Christ. Mark He does not say, “Where I shall be,” or “Where I then am, ye cannot come”; but, though still on earth, He declared, “Where I am, thither ye cannot come.” In the previous verse He had said, “I go unto him that sent me.” These two statements refer severally, to His distinct natures. “Where I am” intimated His perpetual presence in heaven by virtue of His Divine nature; His going there was yet a future thing for His human nature!

“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?*” (John 7:35).

How true it is that “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). Devoid of any spiritual perception, these Jews were unable to understand Christ’s reference to His return to heaven. When they asked, “Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles?” they were referring to those Jews who lived away from Palestine. The Greek word is “diaspora” and signifies the Dispersion. It is found only here and in James 1:1 where it is rendered “The twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” literally, “in the dispersion”, and in 1 Peter 1:1, “sojourners of the dispersion.” Further, these Jews asked, “Will he teach the Gentiles?” What an evidence is this that unbelief will think about anything but God? God not being in their thoughts, it never

occurred to them that the Lord Jesus might be referring to His Father in heaven; hence their minds turned to the dispersion and the Gentiles. It is thus even with a Christian when he is under the control of unbelief: the last one he will think of is God. Solemn and humbling commentary is this on the corruption of our natural heart.

“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?” (John 7:36).

And mark it, these were not illiterate men who thus mused, but men of education and religious training. But no amount of culture or religious instruction can impart spiritual understanding to the intellect. A man must be Divinely illumined before he can perceive the meaning and value of the things of God. The truth is that the most illiterate babe in Christ has a capacity to understand spiritual things which an unregenerate university graduate does not possess. The plainest and simplest word from God is far above the reach of the natural faculties.

“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” (John 7:37).

Their celebration of this Feast of tabernacles was drawing to a close. The “last” or eighth day had now arrived. It is here termed “the last great day of the feast”; in John 19:31 the same word is rendered “high day.” It was so called because on this closing day there was a general and solemn convocation of the worshippers (see Leviticus 23:36). On this eighth day, when the temple courts would be thronged with unusually large crowds, Jesus “stood and cried.” What a contrast this pointed between Himself and those who hated Him: they desired to rid the world of Him; He to minister unto needy souls.

“Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” Here is the Gospel in a single short sentence. Three words in it stand out and call for special emphasis — “thirst,” “come,” “drink.” The first tells of a recognized need. Thirst, like hunger, is something of which we are acutely conscious. It is a craving for that which is not in our actual possession. There is a soul

thirst as well as a bodily. The pathetic thing is that so many thirst for that which cannot slake them. Their thirst is for the things of the world: pleasure, money, fame, ease, self-indulgence; and over all these Christ has written in imperishable letters, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.”

But in our text Christ is referring to a thirst for something infinitely nobler and grander, even for Himself. He speaks of that intense longing for Himself which only the Spirit of God can create in the soul. If a poor sinner is convicted of his pollution and desires cleansing, if he is weighted down with the awful burden of conscious guilt and desires pardon, if he is fully aware of his weakness and impotency and longs for strength and deliverance, if he is filled with fears and distrust and craves for peace and rest, — then, says Christ, let him “come unto me.” Happy the one who so thirsts after Christ that he can say,

“As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1).

“Let him come unto me.” “Come” is one of the simplest words in the English language. It signifies our approach to an object or person. It expresses action, and implies that the will is operative. To come to Christ means, that you do with your heart and will what you would do with your feet were He standing in bodily form before you and saying, “Come unto me.” It is an act of faith. It intimates that you have turned your back upon the world, and have abandoned all confidence in everything about yourself, and now cast yourself empty-handed, at the feet of incarnate Grace and Truth. But make sure that nothing whatever is substituted for Christ. It is not, come to the Lord’s table, or come to the waters of baptism, or come to the priest or minister, or come and join the church; but come to *Christ Himself*, and to none other.

“And drink.” It is here that so many seem to fail. There are numbers who give evidence of an awakened conscience, of heart-exercise, of a conscious need of Christ; and there are numbers who appear to be seeking Him, and yet stop short at that. But Christ not only said, “Come unto me,” but He added, “and drink.” A river flowing through a country where people were dying of thirst, would avail them nothing unless they drink of it. The blood of the slain lamb

availed the Israelite household nothing, unless the head of that household had applied it to the door. So Christ saves none who do not receive Him by faith. “Drinking” is here a figurative expression, and signifies making Christ your own. In all ages God’s saints have been those who saw their deep need, who came to the Lord, and appropriated the provision of grace.

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” Let us not forget where these words were first uttered. The Speaker was not in a penitentiary, but in the Temple. Christ was not addressing a company of profligates, but a religious crowd who were observing a Divinely-instituted Feast! What an example for each of His servants! Brother preacher, take nothing for granted. Do not suppose that because those you address are respectable people and punctual in their religious exercises they are necessarily saved. Heed that word of your Master’s, and “preach the gospel to every creature,” cultured as well as illiterate, the respectable as well as the profligate, the religious man as well as the irreligious.

“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

The language used by our Lord really implies that He had some definite passage in mind. We believe that He referred to Isaiah 58:11, And thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” Our Lord applies the promise to believers of the present dispensation. The believer should not be like a sponge-taking in but not giving out — but like a spring, ever fresh and giving forth. Twice before had Christ employed “water” as a figure, and it is striking to observe the progressive order. In John 3:5 He had spoken of a man being born “of water and of the Spirit”: here the “water” comes down *from God* — cf. John 3:3 margin, “born From above.” In John 4:14 He says, “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Here the “water” springs up to God, reaching out to the Source from whence it came. But in John 7:38 He says, “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” Here the “water” flows forth *for God* in blessing to others.

“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” This verse describes the normal

Christian, and yet, how many of us would say that its contents are receiving a practical exemplification in our daily lives? How many of us would make so bold as to affirm that out of our innermost part are flowing “rivers of living water”? Few indeed, if we were honest and truthful. What, then, is wrong? Let us examine the verse a little more attentively.

“Out of his belly shall flow.” What is the “belly”? It is that part of man which *constantly craves*. It is that part which, in his fallen condition, is the natural man’s god — “Whose god is their belly” (Philippians 3:19), said the apostle: styled their “god” because it receives the most care and attention. The “belly” is that part of man which is never really satisfied, for it is constantly crying for something else to appease its cravings. Now the remarkable thing, yea, the blessed thing, is, that not only is the believer himself satisfied, but he overflows with that which satisfies — out of his innermost parts “flow (forth) rivers of living water” The thought indeed is a striking one. It is not merely “from him” shall flow, but “*out of his belly shall flow;*” that is, from that very part of our constitution which, in the natural man, is never satisfied, there shall be a constant overflow.

Now how is the believer satisfied? The answer is, By “coming” to Christ and *drinking*; which mean *receiving* from Him: by having his emptiness ministered to from His fulness. But does this refer only to *a single act*? Is this something that is done once for all? Such seems to be the common idea. Many appear to imagine that grace is a sort of thing which God puts into the soul like a seed, and that it will grow and develop into more. Not that we deny that the believer grows, but the believer grows *in grace*; it is not the grace in him which grows! O dear Christian reader, we are to continue as we began. Where was it that you found rest and peace? It was in Christ. And how did you obtain these? It was from a consciousness of your need (thirsting), and your coming to Christ to have this met, and by appropriating from Him. But why stop there? This ought to be a daily experience. And it is our failure at this very point which is the reason why John 7:38 does not describe our spiritual history.

A vessel will not overflow until it is full, and to be full it has to be filled! How simple; and yet how searching! The order of Christ in

the scripture before us has never changed. I must first come to Him and “drink” before the rivers of living water will flow forth from my satisfied soul. What the Lord most wants from us is receptiveness, that is, the capacity to receive, to receive from Him. I must receive from Him, before I can give out for Him. The apostles came to Christ for the bread before they distributed to the hungry multitude. Here is the secret of all real service. When my own “belly” has been filled, that is, when my own needy heart has been satisfied by Christ, then no effort will be required, but out from me shall flow “rivers of living water.” O may Divine grace teach us daily to first come to Christ before we attempt anything for Him.

“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” (John 7:39).

This intimates a further reason why we are told in verse 37 that the words there recorded were uttered by Christ on “the *last*” day, that is the eighth day of the Feast. In Scripture eight ever refers to a new beginning, and for this reason, like the numeral three, eight is also the number of resurrection: Christ arose on the eighth day, “in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first of the week” (Matthew 28:1). And, doctrinally considered, Christ was here speaking as from resurrection ground. He was referring to that which could not receive its accomplishment till after He had risen from the dead. When he said “the Holy Spirit was not yet,” John meant that He was not yet publicly manifested on earth. His manifestation was subsequent to the glorification of Christ.

“Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet” (John 7:40).

The line of thought found in this verse and the twelve that follow it might be termed, The testing of men by the truth, and their failure to receive it. The first class brought before us here is the common people. Many of them were impressed by the gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of Christ. They said, “Of a truth this is the Prophet.” Their language was identical with that of the Galileans, recorded in John 6:14. But observe they merely said, “This is the Prophet.” We are not told that they received Him as such. Words are cheap, and worth little unless followed by action. It

is significant, however, that John was the only one of the Evangelists that records these sayings of the people, for they were in harmony with his special theme. As its first verse intimates, the fourth Gospel presents Christ as “the Word,” that is, the Speech, the Revealer, of God. A “prophet” is God’s spokesman!

“Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, 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?” (John 7:41, 42).

Here is another illustration of an acquaintance with the letter of the Word which failed to regulate the walk. These people could quote prophecy while they rejected Christ! How vain is an intellectual knowledge of spiritual things when unaccompanied by grace in the heart! These men knew where Christ was to be born. They referred to the Scriptures as though familiar with their contents. And yet the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened. The Messiah Himself stood before them, but they knew Him not. What a solemn warning is there here for us! A knowledge of the letter of Scripture is not to be despised, far from it: would that all the Lord’s people today were as familiar with the Word as probably these Jews were. It is a cause for deep thankfulness if we were taught to read and memorize Scripture from our earliest childhood. But while a knowledge of the letter of Scripture is to be prized, it ought not to be over-estimated. It is not sufficient that we are versed in the historical facts of the Bible, nor that we have a clear grasp, intellectually, of the doctrines of Christianity. Unless our hearts are affected and our lives moulded by God’s Word, we are no better off than a starving man with a cook book in his hand.

“Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, 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 words are recorded for our learning. We must not pass them over hurriedly as though they contained no message for us. They should lead us to solemnly and seriously examine ourselves. There are many today who, like these men of old, can quote the Scriptures readily and accurately, and yet who give no evidence that they have been born again. An experiential acquaintance with Christ

is the one thing needful. A heart knowledge of God's truth is the vital thing, and it is that which no schooling or seminary training can confer. If you have discovered the plague of your own heart; if you have seen yourself as a lost sinner, and have received as yours the sinner's Savior; if you have tasted for yourself that the Lord is gracious; if you are now, not only a hearer but a doer of the Word; then, abundant cause have you to thank God for thus enlightening you. You may be altogether ignorant of Hebrew and Greek, but if you know Him, whom to know is life eternal, and if you sit daily at His feet to be taught of Him, then have you that which is above the price of rubies. But O make quite sure on the point, dear reader. You cannot afford to remain in uncertainty. Rest not, until by Divine grace you can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. And if your eyes have been opened, pray God daily to give you a better *heart-knowledge* of His Word.

["So there was a division among the people because of him"  
\(John 7:43\).](#)

How this fulfilled His own predicted word. Near the beginning of His public ministry (cf. Matthew 10:34,35) He said,

["Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three," etc. \(Luke 12:51, 52\).](#)

So it proved then, and so it has been ever since. Why we do not know. God's ways are ever different from ours. There will be another "division" among the people of the earth when the Lord Jesus leaves the Father's throne and descends into the air; yea, a "division" also among the people in the graves. Only the "dead in Christ" shall then be raised, and only the living ones who have been saved by Him will be "caught up together to meet the Lord in the air." The rest will be left behind. What a "division" that will be! In which company would you be, dear reader, were Christ to come today?

"So there was a division among the people because of him." If this was the ease when Christ was upon earth, then we must not be surprised if those who faithfully serve Him occasion a "division"

during His absence. Scripture says, “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.” Read through the book of Acts and note what “divisions” the preaching of the apostles caused. Mark that solemn but explicit word in 1 Corinthians 11:19,

“For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you” (R.V.).

How senseless, then, is all this modern talk about the union of Christendom. Fellow-preacher, if you are faithfully declaring all the counsel of God, be not surprised, nor be dismayed, if there is a “division” because of you. Regard it as an ominous sign if it be otherwise.

“And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him” (John 7:44).

This is similar to what was before us in verse 30. Again and again is this noted in John’s Gospel: cf. John 5:16, 18; 17:1; 8:20; 10:39, etc. But they were powerless before the decrees of God. “Some of them *would have* taken him.” The Greek word means they “desired” to do so. They had a will to, but not the ability. Ah! men may boast of their will-power and of their “free will,” but after all, what does it amount to? Pilate said,

“Knowest thou not that *I have power* to crucify thee, and have power to release thee” (John 19:10).

So he boasted, and so he really believed. But what was our Lord’s rejoinder? “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” It was so here: these men *desired* to arrest Christ, but they were not given power from above to do so. Verily, we may say with the prophet of old,

“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

“Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have you not brought him?” (John 7:45).

Well might they ask such a question, for they were totally ignorant of the real answer. Well might Pharaoh now ask, Why did I fail in

destroying the Hebrews? Or Nero, Why did I not succeed in exterminating all the Christians? Or the king of Spain, Why did my “invincible Armada” fail to reach the English ports and destroy the British navy? Or the Kaiser, Why did my legions not succeed in taking Paris? In each case the answer would be, Because God did not allow you to! Like these other infamous characters, the Pharisees had reckoned without God. They sent their officers to arrest Christ: they might as well have ordered them to stop the sun from shining. Not all the hosts of earth and hell could have arrested Him one moment before God’s predestined hour had arrived. Ah, dear reader, the God of the Bible is no mere figurehead. He is Supreme in fact as well as in name. When He gets ready to act none can hinder; and until He is ready, none can speed Him. This is a hateful thought for His enemies, but one full of comfort to His people. If you, my reader, are fighting against Him, be it known that the great God laughs at your consummate folly, and will one day ere long deal with you in His fury. On the other hand, if you are, by sovereign grace, one of His children, then He is for you, and *if God be for you, who can be against you?* Who, indeed!

“The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.”  
(John 7:46).

What a testimony was this from unbelievers! Instead of arresting Him, they had been arrested by what they had heard, Mark again how this magnifies Christ as “*the Word*”! It was not His miracles which had so deeply impressed them, but His speech! “Never man spake as this man.” True indeed was their witness, for the One they had listened to was more than “man” — “the Word was God”! No man ever spake like Christ because His words were spirit and life (John 6:63). What sayest thou of Christ, my reader? Do you own that “never man spake as this man”? Have His words come to you with a force that none other’s ever did? Have they pierced you through to “the dividing asunder of soul and spirit”? Have they brought life to your soul, joy to your heart, rest to your conscience, peace to your mind? Ah, if you have heard Him say “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” and you have responded to His voice, then can you say indeed, “Never man spake like this man.”

“Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7:47, 48).

The “rulers” were men of official rank; the “Pharisees,” the religious formalists of that day. Few “rulers” or men of eminent standing, few “scribes” or men of erudition, few “Pharisees” or men of strict morality, were numbered among the followers of the Lamb. They were too well satisfied with themselves to see any need of a Savior. The sneering criticism of these Pharisees has been repeated in every age, and the very fact that it is made only supplies another evidence of the veracity of God’s Word. Said the apostle Paul, “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but 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 naught things which are” (1 Corinthians 1:26- 28). And why? — “that no flesh *should glory* in his presence”!

“But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed” (John 7:49).

“This people” was a term of contempt. It has been rendered by some scholars, “This rabble — this mob — this rift raft.” Nothing was more mortifying to these proud Pharisees, and nothing is more humiliating to their modern descendants than to find harlots and publicans entering the kingdom while they are left outside.

“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?” (John 7:50, 51).

Have any of the Pharisees believed on Christ, they asked? Not many had, but at least one had, as Nicodemus gave evidence. Here is the one ray of light which relieves this dark picture. Sovereign grace had singled out one of these very Pharisees, and gave him courage to rebuke his unrighteous fellows. It is true that Nicodemus does not appear to have said much on this occasion, but he said sufficient to break up their conference. Not yet did he come out boldly on the

Lord's side; but he was no longer one of His enemies. The work of grace proceeds slowly in some hearts, as in the case of Nicodemus; for eighteen months had elapsed since what is recorded in John 3. With others the work of grace acts more swiftly, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Here, as everywhere, God acts according to His own sovereign pleasure. Later, if the Lord will, Nicodemus will come before us again, and then we shall behold the full corn in the ear. John's Gospel depicts three stages in the spiritual career of Nicodemus. In John 3 it is midnight: here in John 7 it is twilight: in John 19 it is daylight in his soul.

[“They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” \(John 7:52\).](#)

But they were wrong. Their own Scriptures refuted them. Jonah was a “prophet,” and he arose from Galilee: see 2 Kings 14:25. So, most probably, did one or two other of their prophets. When they asked Nicodemus, “Art thou also of Galilee?” they evidently meant, Art thou also a Galilean, that is, one of His party?

[“And every man went unto his own house” \(John 7:53\).](#)

The reference here is to “every man” mentioned throughout this chapter. The Feast was now over. The temporary “booths” would be taken down: and all would now retire to their regular dwellings. “Every man went unto his own house” is very solemn. Away from Christ they went. Him they left! They desired His company no longer. And there the curtain falls.

The following questions are designed to prepare the student for the next chapter on John 8:1-11: —

Wherein does this passage supply a further proof of the awful condition of Israel?

What is the force and significance of “He sat down”? verse 2 — contrast “Jesus stood” in John 7:37.

Wherein lay the “temptation”? verse 6.

What was the significance of Christ writing with His finger on the ground? verse 6.

Why did He “again” write on the ground? verse 8.

According to which of the Divine attributes was Christ acting in verse 11?

What do the words “go, and sin no more” (verse 11) evidence?

## FOOTNOTES

[#1](#) “We must not, however, limit this picture to Israel, for it is equally applicable and pertinent to sinners of the Gentiles too. Israel in the flesh was only a sample of fallen man as such. What we have here is a pointed and solemn delineation of human depravity . . . its normal application is to the whole of Adam’s fallen race. Let every reader see here a portrait of what he or she is by nature. The picture is not a flattering one we know. No, it is drawn by one who searches the innermost recesses of the human heart, and is presented here to humble us.” (A.W.P.). And so all through.

[#2](#) (No doubt the reader will be glad to know that the Author has published a booklet containing the substance of the above entitled The New Birth, which the Lord has been pleased to own in blessing to many. Price 15 cents per copy. Order from the Bible Truth Depot, Swengel, Pa. — I. C. H.).

[#3](#) We do not think the time would be wasted if the above paragraphs were re-read before proceeding farther.

[#4](#) Note there is a sevenfold reference to the “Feast” in John 7.

[#5](#) That this is the same Feast appears by a comparison of Deuteronomy 16:16 with Exodus 23:14-17.

[#6](#) This is a work we strongly recommend to those who desire to be students of the Word. It gives the original Greek and immediately beneath, a literal, word for word, English translation. Obtainable from the publisher of this book.

[#7](#) See the author’s booklet “The Law and the Saint” for a fuller discussion of this subject. Obtainable from the publisher of this book. 30 cents.