

Chapter 1

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Christ the Son of God

The apostle John tells us exactly what his purpose was in writing his gospel narrative — “*Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*” (20:30-31). John wrote his Gospel to show us that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God; and he begins his message by stating that fact clearly, emphatically, and beautifully — “*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*” (1:1-2).

There is one word used throughout these 21 chapters. That one word is the key to all things spiritual, the key to spiritual life, spiritual knowledge, and spiritual understanding. The word is “*believe.*” John uses it 98 times in this Gospel. His intention is that “*we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, we might have life through his name.*” May the God of all grace give us grace to go on believing “*that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*”

Distinctive Features

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “The Synoptic Gospels” because they each give us an orderly, well-arranged narrative of our Savior’s earthly life and ministry, describing (for the most part) the same events in different ways and for different purposes. John’s Gospel is different. It was written much later than the other three. In the Gospel of John we are given the inspired reflections of an old man who had faithfully served the Son of God many, many years. With one foot in heaven, he tells us of his all-glorious Savior, the Son of God, that we might believe him. John’s Gospel is neither a historical biography nor a theological textbook. Rather, what we have here is the loving adoration of a saved sinner for his great Savior, describing the greatness, grace, and glory of the Son of God as he had experienced it.

There are several things that stand out as distinctive features of John’s Gospel. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John does not mention any of our Lord’s parables. Yet, he was inspired to describe miracles not recorded by the other writers. John alone tells us about the Lord Jesus turning water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana (2:1-11), the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:46-54), the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-9), the feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-14), the Lord Jesus coming to his disciples walking across the stormy sea (6:15-21), the healing of the man born blind (9:1-7), and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:38-44).

The miracles described by John seem to have been specifically intended to lay the foundation for something our Lord was about to teach. When the Master was about to teach some great truth, he performed a miracle to illustrate what he was about to say. He had a way of getting people’s attention.

Just before he drove the money changers out of the temple and told how that he was about to build a greater, more glorious temple by his death and resurrection, our Savior turned water into wine. — *“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him”* (2:11). Just before declaring himself to be the Son of God, into whose hands the Father has committed all things in chapter 5, our Lord healed the nobleman’s son and the impotent man. Just before telling us that he is the Bread of Life in chapter 6, our Savior fed 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two small fish. The Lord Jesus came walking across the stormy sea, showing his dominion over all things, teaching us to trust him, just before his disciples saw the multitudes abandon him because of the gospel he preached (chap. 6). In John 8:12 our Savior declared, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* Then, in chapter 9 he healed the man who was born blind and said, *“I am the light of the world.”* After declaring to Martha, *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (11:25), the Master went out to the tomb and raised Lazarus from the dead.

“I AM”

Another distinctive feature of John’s Gospel is the fact that he alone gives us the seven “*I AM*” sayings of Christ. Seven times the Lord says, “*I AM*.” These sayings are very precious and give us a delightful, instructive picture of our Redeemer. “*I AM*” is the name by which the Lord God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14. By taking this title and name as his own the Lord Jesus declared himself to be God, and did so at least seven times.

1. “*I am the bread of life*” (6:35). — If we would live, we must eat this Bread.
2. “*I am the light of the world*” (8:12). — If we would see, we must have this Light.
3. “*I am the door of the sheep*” (10:7). — If we would enter into life, we must enter by this Door.
4. “*I am the good shepherd*” (10:11). — If we are saved, we must be saved by this Shepherd.
5. “*I am the resurrection and the life*” (11:25). — If we would be partakers of resurrection glory and eternal life, he who is the Resurrection and the Life must be ours. We must trust him.
6. “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*” (14:6). — If we would have eternal life, we must be in the Way, know the Truth, and be given the Life.
7. “*I am the true vine*” (15:1). — If we would bring forth fruit unto God, we must be grafted into this Vine.

The significance of our Lord using the words “*I AM*” with reference to himself must not be overlooked. This enraged the Jews because they understood exactly what he meant by them. — He was saying, “I am the eternal God, Jehovah, the Redeemer and Deliverer. I am everything, for I am God.” Using these two words, “*I AM*,” with reference to himself, he identified himself as the covenant God of Israel. Liberals and religious infidels today may not recognize that fact; but the Jews who heard the Master understood him perfectly (John 8:58-59; 10:31-33).

John also gives a distinct emphasis to the fact that the Lord Jesus spoke of a specific time and hour for which he came into the world (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27-28; 13:1; 17:1).

Divisions

In chapters 1-12 John tells us who Christ is, giving highlights of his life and ministry during the three years of public, earthly ministry. In chapters 13-21 the apostle gives an account (an account none could give except a tender-hearted old man, full of love for Christ) of our Lord's last night upon the earth, his death as our Substitute, and his resurrection.

Christ our God

That Man Luke described, the Servant Mark portrayed, and the King Matthew declared, Jesus of Nazareth, is himself the Christ, the Son of God, our eternal God and Savior. That is what John asserts with utter dogmatism in chapter 1. John declares that this man is the Word who is God (v. 1), the second person of the holy trinity, altogether equal with the Father (v. 2), the Creator of all things (v. 3), and the incarnate God our Savior (vv. 10-18, 29). This Man who is God is the Lamb of God, spoken of and typified throughout the Old Testament, by whose sacrifice our sins are taken away.

Best Things Last

In chapter 2, when our Lord turned the water into wine and began to show forth his glory, the governor of the feast said to the bridegroom, *“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”* (v. 10). That is exactly what our Savior does in his wondrous works of grace. He saves the best wine until the last (1 Cor. 2:9). As good as the experience of God's grace in Christ is here, it is but a foretaste of that which awaits us in heaven's glory.

The New Birth

In the first chapter we are told that sinners are made to be the sons of God and are born again by the will of God alone (11-13). In chapter 3 we have our Lord's discourse on the new birth with Nicodemus. Here he shows us both the nature and necessity of the new birth. Until a person is born again he can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God (vv. 3, 5). And this new birth is altogether the work of God the Holy Spirit sovereignly giving life and faith to whom he will (v. 8). Then, the Master told Nicodemus that the only way any sinner can live before God, the only way we can be saved is by trusting him as our sin-atoning Substitute (vv. 14-18).

All grace, all salvation, all life, all hope is in Christ. Do you believe on the Son of God? Do you trust Christ alone as your Savior? That is the one thing that must be settled. To believe Christ is to have life. To abide in unbelief is to abide in death, under the wrath of God. That was John the Baptist's message and that is the message of God's preachers in every age and place — *“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. (36) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (vv. 35-36). *“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life”* (1 John 5:12).

The Samaritan Woman

In chapter 4 John gives us a tremendous picture of God's grace. Our Lord Jesus "*must needs go through Samaria*" because there was an elect sinner there for whom the time of love had come. Grace chose her. Grace marked the place at which grace would be given. Grace brought the Samaritan woman to the appointed place at the time of love. Grace brought Christ to the sinner. And grace brought the sinner to Christ and gave her faith.

The Impotent Man

In chapter 5 our Savior came to the Pool of Bethesda. There were many around the pool who were impotent, blind, halt, and withered. But the sovereign Savior came there to show mercy to one certain man, a certain chosen sinner who had been impotent for 38 years. "*And immediately the man was made whole*" (v. 9).

That is another picture of God's saving grace. It is sovereign, distinguishing, effectual grace. Spiritually, God's elect are totally impotent. We could never be saved if any part of salvation depended on us. But that is not the case. The Lord Jesus saves poor, impotent sinners by his own almighty arm of omnipotent mercy (Eph. 2:1-5).

Witnesses to Christ

In the second half of chapter 5 our Lord Jesus shows himself to be the Christ by numerous witnesses. As we read these verses and others like them (10:16-18), we must not imagine that our Lord is declaring anything that might suggest him being inferior to the Father. Rather, our Lord is declaring his voluntary subjection to the will of his Father (Isa. 50:5-7) as our Mediator and Surety.

"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. 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. 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 men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. 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. 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. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 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. 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. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (John 5:19-31).

John the Baptist bore witness to him as the Christ, the Lamb of God, the eternal Savior (vv. 33-35). His own works bear witness that he is the Christ, the Son of God, our Savior (v. 36 — His Miracles — His Satisfaction — The Rent Veil). The Father bore witness to Christ (v. 37 — At His Baptism — At His Transfiguration), trusting him as our Surety (Eph. 1:12), putting all things in his hands as the Son of Man (v. 27), and giving him all pre-eminence (Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:8-11). And the Book of God bears witness to him, that he is indeed the Christ (vv. 37-39). Moses (vv. 46-47), in all the books of the law, bore witness to him, typically and prophetically, and by the veil being rent when he had fulfilled the whole law, satisfying the wrath and justice of God as our Representative.

The Offence of the Gospel

Multitudes followed our Savior, not because they were converted by his grace, but because they had eaten the loaves and fish. They were religious because they found religion profitable. They followed Christ outwardly because of what they gained by doing so. But, then, our Lord preached a message that offended the crowd. We read in John 6:66 — *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”* What did he preach? What was it that so greatly offended the multitudes? It was the message of God’s free, sovereign, saving grace, the same message that offends lost religious crowds throughout the world today. It was the declaration that salvation is by the will of God alone (vv. 37-40). He asserted that fallen man’s natural, total depravity makes salvation by the will of man impossible (v. 44). Our Master declared that salvation is altogether the work of God’s free, sovereign, irresistible grace (v. 45) and this salvation can be possessed only by faith in Christ, eating his flesh and drinking his blood, trusting his righteousness and his atonement as our only ground of acceptance with God (vv. 47-58). This salvation was obtained by Christ laying down his life for chosen sinners scattered throughout the world (v. 51).

“These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:59-66).

These were the same people who sought just a short while earlier, to take him by force and make him a king (6:15).

“If Any Man Thirst”

In the seventh chapter “*the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand.*” His brethren tried to get the Lord to go up to the feast, to show himself to the world, but he refused. Later, he went up to the feast privately. Then, on the last day of the feast, as our Master beheld the multitudes going home from their empty, meaningless religious ritual, he proclaimed a great, gracious, magnanimous invitation to needy souls that is echoed around the world to this day, wherever the gospel is preached. — “*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*” (vv. 37-38).

The Adulterous Woman

The eighth chapter opens (vv. 1-11) with a tremendous picture of redemption and grace in Christ. A woman taken in adultery, scorned by men and condemned by God’s holy law, is freely and fully forgiven of all sin by the Son of God who stooped to the earth and rose again.

Disciples Indeed

Beginning in verse 31 of chapter 8 our Lord gives us four unmistakable marks by which true disciples, true children of Abraham are identified in this world: (1.) They do the works of Abraham (v. 39). That is to say, they believe God. (2.) True disciples love Christ (v. 42; 1 John 4:19). (3.) They receive, bow to, and believe God’s Word (v. 47). (4.) They keep Christ’s doctrine (v. 51). They continue in his Word (v. 31) and holdfast the gospel.

The Good Shepherd

In the 9th chapter our Lord healed a man who was born blind. Because of the goodness of God, which he experienced, the Jews churched him. They kicked him out of their church because the Son of God gave him sight. When they did, the Lord Jesus took him into his arms and into the sheepfold of his grace. Then, John gives us our Savior’s great discourse on the Good Shepherd (chap. 10). Christ is the Good Shepherd. He has some sheep. He voluntarily laid down his life for his sheep. He calls his sheep by name. He must and shall save his sheep. He gives his sheep eternal life. His sheep shall never perish!

Lazarus

The 11th chapter tells us about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, our Lord’s beloved friends, and the sickness and death of Lazarus by the will of God and for the glory of God. Then, we see the Son of God raise Lazarus from the dead by the Word of his omnipotence. What a picture this is of God’s saving operations of grace! Like Lazarus, I was dead. Like Lazarus, the Lord Jesus loved me. He came to where I was. He called me by name. I came forth to him. And he set me free.

Chapter 12 opens with our Lord in the home of his friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus again. Mary anoints him for his burial. As he sets his face toward Calvary, our Lord declares that which he would there accomplish by the sacrifice of himself — “*Now is the judgment of this world:*

now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (vv. 31-33).

Foot Washing

Chapter 13 begins the second section of John’s Gospel. Everything, from here through the end of chapter 19 took place in the last hours of our Savior’s earthly life. In chapter 13 he gives us an example of how we ought to love one another by washing his disciples’ feet. He did not do this to establish foot washing as a church ordinance, but to show us how to love one another. Love involves action, not sentimental words. Love bows low and gladly performs the most menial task for the sheer comfort of its object. — *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (v. 35).*

Then our Lord told Peter how that he would deny him three times before the morning sun arose. — *“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice” (vv. 36-38).*

Immediately after that, we read those sweet, sweet words of comfort and assurance in John 14:1-3. — *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 Peter must have cherished those words after his fall and restoration!

Comfort

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 are filled with words of tender comfort and instruction for God’s people in this world in which we must endure constant sorrow and tribulation. — *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (16:33).*

The Lord’s Prayer

Then, in chapter 17 John gives us the Lord’s great, high priestly prayer for us, in which he prays not for the world but for his elect, asking his Father to keep us throughout our days on earth, through all our tribulations, and then to bring us safe to glory. Only in eternity can we know the full scope of our Lord’s words recorded here.

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 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:

for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them”
(17:22-26)

When I compare John 17:5 with John 17:22, I am utterly overwhelmed. Can it be true? Has the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our all-glorious Redeemer given to everyone of his elect all the glory the Father gave to him as our covenant Surety and Mediator, all the glory that he now possesses as the God-man in heaven? Are we really and truly so perfectly one with him and so perfectly accepted in him that we shall all fully possess all the glory the Father gave him as the reward of his obedience unto death? Yes, O my soul, yes, it is true! He who is God and cannot lie declares it to be so!

Gethsemane

Chapter 18 brings us with our all-glorious Christ into Gethsemane. But John leaves out most of the things described by Matthew and Luke. Instead, he tells us of our Savior’s care for his disciples when the soldiers came to arrest him, emphasizing the fact that he is God in total control, even over those who arrested him. Here again, we have a picture of redemption and grace. As if to demonstrate that he is God over all, not a helpless victim, the Savior takes the initiative. He asked the soldiers, “*Whom seek ye?*” When they told him they had come for that man called Jesus, he declared, “*I AM,*” and they fell down as dead men. Those men, representing the law by which he was to be executed, were slain before him. Then, the Master said, “*I AM*” (“*He*” is in italics.), “*If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.*” That is exactly what our Savior says to the law of God. You can’t have me and my sheep. If you take me, you must let my people go free.

“It is Finished”

In chapter 19 our Savior is crucified. In verse 30 we read these great, triumphant words of our victorious Redeemer, — “*It is finished!*” — “*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*” What was finished? The law was finished, being satisfied (Rom. 10:4). The prophets were finished, being fulfilled. All the work he came to do (Matt. 1:21) was finished. Atonement was finished. Righteousness was finished. Judgment was finished. Sin was finished.

Restoration

Chapters 20 and 21 tell us about our Lord’s resurrection and his appearances to his disciples after the resurrection. By his death and resurrection as our Substitute, our Lord Jesus reconciled us to our God, restored all that we had lost by the sin and fall of our father Adam, and restored us entirely to our God. Is it not most fitting that John shows us the restoration of his fallen disciple in this context? The Lord Jesus came to Peter in grace, assuring him of his love and forgiveness, and assuring Peter of his love for his Savior.

Conclusion

We read in John 21:25, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*” When John says, “*I suppose,*” he is still writing by inspiration. It is as though the Lord God is telling us, — “You cannot imagine how big my Son is, how great he is, and what wonders he has accomplished. If you go into every detail of who he is and what he has done, the world itself would not hold the books it would take to declare it all.” There could not be a more fitting conclusion of the Gospel of the Son of God.

Chapter 2

“In the Beginning”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

One of the old writers suggested, “These words should be written upon tablets of gold and hung in every church building in the world.” In the 2nd century Clement of Alexandria wrote that one of the atheistic Platonic philosophers said of John 1:1, “This barbarian hath comprised more stupendous stuff in three lines, than we have done in all our voluminous discourses.” May God the Holy Spirit teach us that which he inspired an unlearned and ignorant man like John, the son of Zebedee the fisherman, to write in these three lines. — *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

“The Beginning”

The other Gospel writers begin with Bethlehem. John begins with *“the bosom of the Father.”* Luke dates his narrative by Roman emperors and Jewish high-priests. John dates his *“in the beginning.”* With those words, he carries us into the depths of eternity, before time or creatures were. Both the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of John start from *“the beginning.”* Genesis starts with *“the beginning”* and works downward, telling us what followed. John starts with *“the beginning”* and works upward, telling us what preceded *“the beginning.”* Before the beginning, Christ the Word, our God and Savior, already was.

John’s Gospel opens with three simple words that are full of instruction. — *“In the beginning.”* In 1st John this same Apostle used similar language to describe our Savior and speaks of him as *“That which was from the beginning”* (1 John 1:1). — But what is he talking about? Certainly, he is not talking about the beginning of eternity, for eternity has no beginning. John is talking about the beginning of the manifestation or Jehovah’s purpose of grace, the beginning of his great work of saving his elect by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, whose *“goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2). It seems to me that he is telling us that there was a beginning before the beginning of time. Our blessed Savior went forth from the beginning as our covenant Surety to save us from our sins (Proverbs 8:22-23; Isaiah 46:9-10; Acts 15:18; Colossians 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:10; 1 John 2:14).

John here teaches us to look upon the Son of God, both as the Essential Word and as the Revealed Word, standing forth in the everlasting councils of the triune God as our Surety and set up as the Wisdom of God from everlasting (Proverbs 8:22-31). In the beginning, before ever the earth was made, Christ stood forth as the Word in and by whom the Lord God would make himself known in the salvation of chosen sinners. He was not only the Word from the beginning, but *“in the beginning.”* — *“In the beginning”* he stood forth as our covenant Surety. — *“In the beginning”* he was accepted as *“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”* — *“In the beginning”* we were chosen, accepted, blessed, and redeemed in him (Ephesians 1:3-7).

“The Word”

“In the beginning was the Word.” — John calls our Lord Jesus Christ *“the Word.”* This is a term used in the New Testament almost exclusively by John, identifying Christ as one who is God, and yet a distinct Person from the Father. I can think of only two places in which other inspired writers used this term in the New Testament with reference to our Savior. In Hebrews 4:12-13 we read — *“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”* In 2nd Peter 3:5 we read, *“that by the Word of God the heavens were of old.”*

A word is an expression, a means of manifestation, communication, and revelation. Christ manifests the invisible God, communicates the love, mercy, and grace of God, and reveals the attributes and perfections of God. The Word of God, then, is Deity expressing itself. Therefore Christ is called the Word of God (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In Revelation 1:8 our Savior declares himself to be God’s alphabet. — *“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”* Christ is the Word in and by whom the triune God makes himself known to men, the personal enunciation of Jehovah (John 1:18).

Christ, the Word, is one of the Holy Three-in-One that bear record in heaven. — *“There are three that bear record in heaven”* (1 John 5:7). Bear record of what? That Jesus is the Son of God? No. Heaven needs no evidence of that! These three bear record in heaven that God has given us eternal life, in strict accordance with his just and righteous law, by the merits of Christ’s obedience and death as our Substitute. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity bear record in heaven that Christ has accomplished redemption for God’s elect by his blood atonement. — *“There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”*

God the Father bears record that redemption is accomplished by his acceptance of Christ as our Representative and Surety (Hebrews 1:1-9; 6:19-20; 10:11-14). When the Father raised Christ from the dead and received him back into heaven as our Mediator, he accepted all his elect in Christ and bare record that redemption’s work was done (Ephesians 1:6; John 17:1-5).

God the Son, the living, eternal Word, the second person of the blessed Trinity, bears record of his people’s right to eternal life, by his perpetual advocacy and intercession at the Father’s right hand (Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 6:20; 7:24-25). The record he bears, which secures the eternal salvation of God’s elect, by which we merit heaven and eternal life, is twofold: His righteousness as our Representative and His satisfaction as our Substitute.

God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the holy Trinity, bears record of the accomplishment of redemption, by effectually applying the blood of Christ to the hearts of God’s elect in effectual calling (John 16:14; Hebrews 9:13-14). The Spirit of God takes the merit of Christ’s blood and righteousness and reveals our acceptance with God to us by the gospel. In effectual calling chosen, redeemed sinners hear the gospel. But they hear more than the bare

word of the gospel. They hear the Spirit of God speak in their hearts! Each one hears God speak pardon to his own soul by the gospel of his salvation (Ephesians 1:13; 2 Corinthians 5:16). — This is the record of heaven. The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit point to the blood and righteousness of Christ and say, “*It is finished!*” Redemption is accomplished!”

“*And these three are one.*” — The three Divine Persons are one God. But more, the record of the Father, the record of the Word, and the record of the Spirit are one. What is that record? — Redemption is accomplished by Christ alone! Every chosen sinner has the right to enter into heaven by the blood gate, by the merits of Christ. — “*God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*”

Look at this name and title John gives to the Lord Jesus again. — “*The Word.*” — “*In the beginning was the Word.*” That is a statement so full of meaning that it cannot be adequately declared. Christ is called the Word because he is the Wisdom of God. He is called the Word because he is the Person spoken of in all the Old Testament prophecies and the sum of all the promises. Our Redeemer is called the Word because he is the Speaker, the Revealer, and the Interpreter of the Father’s will. And he is called the Word because he is the Image of the invisible God, the Offspring of the Father’s mind, the Express Image of his Person, just as our words (if honestly spoken) are the express image of our minds.

“Was”

John says, “*In the beginning was the Word.*” He does not say, “In the beginning came the Word, or began the word, but *was the Word.*” The word translated “*was*” literally means “was existing.” John is telling us that whenever the beginning was, the Word already was. He is declaring that he who is God our Savior is the eternal One. He is that One who “*was, and is, and is to come*” (Revelation 4:8).

“*In the beginning was the word.*” — No created mind can plunge the depths of this vast ocean or traverse its shoreless breadth. When time and creatures came into being, the Word was. — “*In the beginning was the word.*” No words could have been chosen by God the Holy Spirit that could more perfectly or more emphatically declare that our Lord Jesus Christ is the absolute, uncreated, eternal God.

“With God”

“*And the Word was with God.*” — With those words, John declares that Christ the Word is one with and co-eternal with God. John is declaring the eternal existence of the Word with the Father, his relation and nearness to him, his equality with him, and particularly the distinction of the Word from the Father. He was always with him, and is with him, and ever will be with him. From all eternity, there was an intimate and ineffable union between the first and second Persons in the blessed Trinity, — between Christ the Word and God the Father. Though John here speaks of the Father and the Son, as we saw in 1st John 5:7, the same is true of God the Holy Spirit.

John seems to be emphasizing, not just the eternity of the Word and the eternal union of the Father and the Son, but the eternal communion of the Divine Persons. The preposition “*with*”

is a preposition of direction and means “toward,” or “face to face with,” suggesting both equality and agreement. The phrase might be translated, “and the Word was toward God.” It expresses the idea of motion.

Again, I am reminded of Micah’s description of our Savior as him whose “*goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*” In perfect union, communion, and being with one another, the Father and the Son, the Word and God went forth toward us in everlasting mercy and love in the beginning, from eternity! Christ, the Word, was with the Father in the covenant of grace. He was with the Father in the creation of the universe, and is with him in the providential government of the world. He was with him as the Word and Son of God in heaven, while he as man, was here on earth. And he is now with him as our Advocate on High (1 John 1:1-2).

There is now, always has been, and always shall be a reciprocal, conscious communion, and the active going out of love between the three Persons of the Triune God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, regarding the Salvation of our souls. Imagine that! — As the three Persons of the eternal Godhead are equal in Divinity, but distinct in personality, so all three of the Divine Persons are equal in grace, but distinct in the operations of grace; and all three are and were and forever shall be moving toward us in grace!

God the Father is set before us as the Fountain of all grace (Ephesians 1:3-6). It was God the Father who in the covenant of grace proposed redemption, devised the plan, and chose the people whom he would save by his almighty grace. He found a way whereby his banished ones could be brought back to him and never expelled from his presence. Then, “*in the fulness of time,*” he sent his Son to be the Medium or Mediator of grace to his chosen (Galatians 4:4-6).

God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the channel of all grace (Ephesians 1:7-12). All grace comes to sinners through Christ the Mediator. In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul tells us fourteen times that everything God requires of sinners, does for sinners, and gives to sinners is in Christ. Apart from Christ there is no grace. God will not deal with man, but by Christ. Man cannot deal with God, but by Christ. Christ is the Revelation of God, the incarnation of God, and the only way to God. Are we chosen of God? We are chosen in Christ. Are we blessed of God? We are blessed in Christ. Are we predestinated by God? We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. Are we adopted as the children of God? We are adopted in Christ. Are we accepted of God? We are accepted in Christ. Are we redeemed by God? We are redeemed in Christ. Are we forgiven by God? We are forgiven in Christ. Are we justified before God? We are justified in Christ. Are we sanctified by God? We are sanctified in Christ. Do we know God? We know him in Christ. Do we have an inheritance from God? We have it in Christ. Are we called of God? We are called in Christ.

Do you see this? All grace comes to chosen sinners through Christ, the Word, who is from everlasting “*with God.*” There is no other way the grace of God can reach a sinner. It is the work of Christ upon the cross which has brought grace and justice together in the salvation of sinners. It is through his blood, only through the blood of the cross, that “*mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*” (Psalm 85:10). Blissfully lost in the contemplation of God’s matchless grace in Christ, John Bunyan penned the following rapturous words...

“O Thou Son of the Blessed! Grace stripped Thee of thy glory. Grace brought Thee down from heaven. Grace made Thee bear such burdens of sin, such burdens of curse as are unspeakable. Grace was in Thy heart. Grace came bubbling up from Thy bleeding side. Grace was in Thy tears. Grace was in Thy prayers. Grace streamed from Thy thorn-crowned brow! Grace came forth with the nails that pierced Thee, with the thorns that pricked Thee! Oh, here are unsearchable riches of grace! Grace to make sinners happy! Grace to make angels wonder! Grace to make devils astonished!”

The Fountain of all grace is God the Father. The medium of all grace is God the Son. And God the Holy Spirit is the Administrator of all grace (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is God the Holy Spirit who effectually applies the blood of Christ to chosen, redeemed sinners. He regenerates the dead by omnipotent power (John 6:63). He calls the redeemed with irresistible grace (Psalms 65:4; 110:3; John 16:8-11). He gives faith to the chosen by almighty operations of grace (Ephesians 2:1-9; Colossians 2:12). He seals God’s elect unto everlasting glory.

Redemption was effectually accomplished for God’s elect by Christ at Calvary; and it is effectually applied to all the redeemed by God the Holy Spirit in effectual calling (Hebrews 9:12-14). Without the sovereign, gracious operations of God the Holy Spirit in conversion, no sinner would ever become the beneficiary of grace. He takes the things of Christ and shows them to his people. He quickens those the Father chose. He reclaims those the Son redeemed. And he leads to the Good Shepherd everyone of those lost sheep for whom the Good Shepherd laid down his life (John 10:11). C. D. Cole wrote...

“He conquers the stoutest hearts and cleanses the foulest spiritual leper. He opens the sin-blinded eyes and unstops the sin-closed ears. The blessed Holy Spirit reveals the grace of the Father and applies the grace of the Son.”

All three Persons in the Godhead are equally gracious; and all three must be equally praised. In fact, whenever the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are presented together in the Scriptures, it is always in connection with redemption, grace, and salvation. I have not found an exception.

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Him all creatures here below!
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!”

Sometimes God the Father is presented alone, as when he stood upon Mt. Sinai, clothed with thunder and lightning, delivering the law to Moses. So terrible was his presence that the very mountain shook in the prospect of God’s awesome judgment (Exodus 20:18).

Sometimes God the Son appears alone, as when he appears in his glorious second advent. Then men and women who have despised and rejected him will cry for the mountains to fall upon them and pray in terror that they might be saved from “*the wrath of the Lamb*” (Revelation 6:14).

When God the Holy Spirit is represented alone, the consequences are the same. Those who blaspheme him, committing that sin which can never be forgiven, are reserved as reprobates unto everlasting judgment (Matthew 12:31-32). Whenever one Person in the Trinity is presented alone, the result is judgment.

However, when all three of the Divine Persons are set before us together, as in John 1:1, the consequence is always mercy, grace, redemption, and salvation (Ephesians 1:3-14; Revelation 1:4-6). In other words, the whole Being of God, in all his attributes, in all his glory, in the Trinity of his Persons is set for the everlasting salvation of his elect (Jeremiah 32:41; Romans 8:28-32).

“Was God”

“And the Word was God.” — It is impossible for anyone to read those words with honesty and misunderstand them. John here asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, was, is, and ever shall be in nature, essence, and substance very God of very God, and that as the Father is God, so also the Son is God. Our Savior’s divinity could not be more positively stated. There is no inferiority in the Word to God the Father. The eternal and unchangeable Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one.

“And the Word was God.” — He was not made God, as he was made flesh. He was not constituted or appointed God, or declared God by office and title. *“The Word was God,”* truly and properly God, in the highest sense of the word. Jesus Christ, our Savior, the Word, is Jehovah, our God, God with us, the mighty God, God over all, the great God, the living God, the true God and eternal life. All the perfections of divinity are his. All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him. The works of his hands are the works of him who is God. Creation and providence, redemption and forgiveness, life and death, judgment and mercy are all works of God attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heresy Abolished

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” — With this one sentence, John sweeps away and abolishes every heresy, by which Satan has harassed the Church of God from its beginning.

Arianism, which asserts that Christ is a being inferior to God, Sabellianism, which denies the distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and says that God sometimes manifested himself as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Spirit, Socinianism, Unitarianism, which declares that Jesus Christ was not God at all, but mere man, a good and great man, but only a man, and Arminianism, which declares God to be changeable, as one whose love, will, purpose, and grace are all subject to the will of man, all are swept way by this one blessed declaration of God in his Holy Word, — *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

Without question, there are deep mysteries here, which no man can comprehend, and no language can explain. How can there be a plurality in unity and a unity in plurality, three persons in the Trinity and one God in essence? — How can Christ be at the same time in the Father and with the Father? — These are matters far beyond our feeble understanding. Blessed are they who are content simply to believe the Revelation of God. As one old writer put it, “It is rashness to search too far into it. It is piety to believe it. It is life eternal to know it. And we can never have a full comprehension of it, till we come to enjoy it.”

The Blessedness of It

Let me show you something of the blessedness of that which is here asserted. — “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Christ the Word, who is our God, is eternal life (1 John 1:1-3). Christ, the Word of Life, Christ who is life essential, swallowed up death in victory, and “*brought life and immortality to light by the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:10). “*Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.*” Union being the ground of communion, all that is theirs is ours. This made Moses cry out, “*Happy art thou, O Israel*” (Deuteronomy 33:29).

“*The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us*” (1 John 1:2). Christ is Eternal Life! Look at 1st John 1:5. — “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*” With those words, John tells us what the message is that we are sent to proclaim. He is talking about the revelation of God, whom no man has seen or can see, apart from Christ, the Word, who is both God himself and the Light of life, in and by whom God is revealed. God the Holy Spirit has given us “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” by the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:6). Oh, may “*the Spirit of the living God*” write these things, “*not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of our heart,*” for Christ’s sake, that we may know him who is Eternal Life, and that we may forever walk together in sweet fellowship with one another, and truly in fellowship “*with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,*” that our joy may be full!

Nothing revealed in Holy Scripture more forcibly inspires unity among true believers than the revelation of the Trinity. This is not some abstract point of theological speculation, or some profitless point of doctrinal refinement. This is a subject so far above our comprehension, that it should inspire our deepest reverence and humility, as well as the most circumspect consecration and unity.

In our baptism you and I have publicly avowed our consecration to our God (Romans 6:4-6). Being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we publicly declared our consecration and commitment to obey the will of the Father, live for the glory of the Son, and submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Let every thought about the holy Trinity stimulate in us a desire that we may be one, even as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one (John 17:20-22).

“Who can think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as one — one in nature, one in love, one in purpose — and not hope for the day when the

intercessory prayer of Christ will be answered in the union of all his followers?”
(J. M. Pendleton)

All true believers should earnestly devote themselves, as the sons and daughters of the triune God, to unity. Oh, that God's saints on earth might truly be one in purpose, seeking the glory of God, — one in labor, serving the cause of Christ, — and one in the love of Christ (Philippians 2:2-5). As the children of God in this world, for Christ's sake (Ephesians 4:32-5:1), for his glory, let us learn by the grace of God to be patient with one another, to highly esteem one another, to forgive one another, to be forbearing with one another, and to give deference to one another. Soon, we shall be one in glory (John 17:22; Ephesians 4:1-6).

Chapter 3

The Eternal Christ

“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 any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” (John 1:1-5)

These five verses set before us the matchless sublimity of our Lord Jesus Christ in his eternal being and character. In these five verses inspired by God the Holy Spirit John sets before us heights no mortal mind can hope to scale and depths that none can fathom. Yet, he sets these things before us in such simple, clear language that they cannot be misunderstood, except by those who are willingly ignorant.

John’s Gospel is the Gospel of the eternal Christ. We do not have to guess what John’s purpose was in writing. He tells us plainly in the last verse of chapter 20, — “*These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*” His great aim in these 21 chapters is not merely to inform us of historical facts relating to the life of Christ on this earth. John’s purpose is to show us the deity and eternal Godhead of that man who is known the world over as “*Jesus of Nazareth,*” that we might trust him as God our Savior, and obtain eternal life in him.

What man could have been better suited to show us our Savior’s glorious Godhead? John was distinctly prepared of God for the work. He had been with the Lord from the beginning of his earthly ministry as a chosen Apostle. John was there when the Lord Jesus performed his mighty miracles. John was with him when the Master instituted the Supper. John heard the Savior’s many sermons, his parables, and his explanation of the parables. John laid his head upon the Lord’s chest, as only a loving brother or friend might do. He was with the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane. He was by his side as the Savior poured out his life’s blood upon the cursed tree. John took the Savior’s mother into his own household and provided and cared for her until her death. He was present when the risen Christ ascended back into heaven. He saw the destruction of the Jewish nation, the temple, and the City of Jerusalem. And it was to this man John that our Lord appeared on the Isle of Patmos, showing him all that he would accomplish before time is no more.

In these opening verses of his Gospel John shows us the eternal Christ in his relationship to time, to the Godhead, to creation, and to men.

Relationship to Time

First, John declares our Savior’s relationship to time. Our Savior is not a mere creature of time. He is before all time and the Creator of time. Christ is eternal. John tells us “*in the beginning was the Word.*” He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. He was with the Father “*before the world was*” (John 17:5), possessing from the beginning all the glory that he

now possesses as our successful Surety. He was already existing when matter was first created and before time began. He is “*before all things*” (Colossians 1:17). He is eternal.

“*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*” (vv. 1-2). — Christ, the Word, was continually in being with God, in perfect union, communion, and being with God the Father and God the Spirit. In time he came to be with man; but in the beginning he was with God. The Lord Jesus Christ is God the eternal Son. He is our eternal Surety, “*the Surety of a better covenant,*” our eternal Sacrifice, “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,*” our eternal Shepherd, and our eternal Savior (2 Timothy 1:9-10; Ephesians 1:3-6).

I want you to get the sweet honey found in the honeycomb of our Savior’s glorious eternity. For as long as he has had being, we have had being in him. As soon as he stood forth in the beginning with God, as our Head and Representative, we stood forth in him, as one with him. We were in him as his seed (Psalm 22:30-31). And we were in him as his body (Psalm 139:14-18).

God’s elect are the members of Christ’s mystical body, the church. All the members of his body were written in his book, the book of life, when as yet, as regarding their actual existence, there was none of them. We were given to him in eternity, when he was constituted our covenant Head in the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Thus, we became, in prospect of our Savior’s incarnation, “*members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*” How tenderly our blessed Redeemer reminded his Father of these covenant transactions, when he said in his great intercessory prayer, “*I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them*” (John 17:9-10).

Being thus given to Christ, and constituted members of his mystical body, we can no more perish than Christ himself. He is our Head, and as he is possessed of all power, full of all love, filled with all wisdom, and replete with all mercy, grace, and truth, how can he, how will he allow any of his members to fall out of his body and be lost and separated from him forever? Will any man willingly allow his eye, or his hand, or his foot, or even the tip of his little finger to be cut off? If any member of our body perishes, if we lose an arm or a leg, it is because we have no power to prevent it. But all power in heaven and in earth belongs to Christ. Therefore, not one member of his mystical body, “*the fulness of him that filleth all in all,*” can perish for lack of power in him to save it.

We do not become members of his body when we believe. We were members of his body when he was “*in the beginning with God.*” When we are quickened and made alive unto God savingly and experimentally, by the regenerating work of the Spirit, we are brought into the realization of this blessed eternal union with Christ; but the union was from everlasting.

Relationship to God

Second, John shows us our blessed Savior’s eternal relationship to the triune Godhead. He was from the beginning with God, because he is God, one with the Father and the Spirit. We rejoice

to know that Christ our Savior is God. But, I want you to see the significance of the fact that John here declares that he is the Word, the eternal Logos of the Triune God.

Christ “*was in the beginning with God,*” as the unuttered speech and thought of the triune God. It is only in Christ that God is fully told out. He so fully and so perfectly reveals God that he declares, “*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*” (John 14:9). To know him is to know God (John 17:3). The “*light of the knowledge of the glory of God*” is seen only “*in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

It is Christ the Word, our crucified Substitute, the Lamb of God, who opens the sealed book of God’s eternal purpose, reveals it to us, and fulfills it in the accomplishment of redemption (Revelation 5:1-10). It is Christ the Word, crucified as our Substitute and risen as our Savior, who interprets and fulfills all the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 45-47). It is Christ the Word whom we preach to men, by whom the veil of spiritual darkness is taken away and the glory of God is revealed (2 Corinthians 3:14-18).

Relationship to Creation

Third, John shows us, with sublime simplicity, the relationship of our Lord Jesus Christ to creation. “*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (v. 3). — In the Book of God creation is almost always associated with redemption, because he who is our Creator is our Redeemer, and because creation is meaningless apart from redemption.

Liberals, Mormons, and Russellites (Jehovah Witnesses), and countless other heretics tell us that Christ is but a creature of God. Holy Scripture declares that he is God our Creator! Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Word by whom the worlds and all that they contain were made (Psalm 148:5; Ephesians 3:8-9; Colossians 1:15-19). — “*By (Christ) the Word of God the heavens were of old*” (2 Peter 3:5).

“*All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.*” — He who is before all things is eternal. He who made all things is omnipotent. And he who is eternal and omnipotent is God. And this great God, our Creator, who made all things, is he who has made peace for us by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). In the new creation of grace, as in the creation of the world itself, Christ is the Creator. It is Christ who declares, “*Behold, I make all things new*” (Revelation 21:5). — “*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature!*” And of the new creation, the Book of God everywhere declares, — “*Without him was not anything made that was made!*” Without him there can be no new covenant, no new name, no new and living way, no new heart, no new spirit, no new garment, no new song, no new heaven, and no new earth. — “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*” (Revelation 4:11). If all things were created for his pleasure, it cannot be doubted that “*he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied!*”

Relationship to Men

Fourth, John shows us Christ's relationship to men. — *"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not"* (vv. 4-5).

Christ is Life. *"In him was life."* All natural life, all spiritual life, the resurrection life, and eternal life are all from him who is Life. He who created all things must be the Fountain of life and Giver of life. The word *"life"* is used here in its widest sense. All creature life comes from him, for *"in him we live and move and have our being."* All spiritual life or eternal life comes from and is found in him. He has given us eternal life (1 John 5:11; 11:25-26).

And Christ is Light. *"And the life was the light of men."* The natural light of reason and conscience, as well as spiritual light and heaven's eternal light, come from him who is the Light of men. Christ is the only moral, spiritual Light there is. He is that *"true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"* (v. 9). Every rational man is morally enlightened (Romans 2:15; Romans 1:18-21). That means all are responsible and accountable. Though all men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, all are responsible before God and shall give an account (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12) for the *"Light"* they have despised and refused.

Look at verse 5 again. John tells us that Christ, the Light, blazes forth in the darkness of man's depraved heart and sin-darkened soul. That is clearly the meaning of the first part of verse 5. — *"The light shineth in darkness!"* Then we read, *"and the darkness comprehended it not,"* meaning the darkness perceived no light, though the Light shines ever so brightly.

The word translated *"comprehended"* is sometimes translated *"overtake"* (1 Thessalonians 5:4). Blessed be his name forever, when Christ comes to shine in the hearts of his own, he does not just give light, he causes his own to see the Light. He shines with such irresistible Light in the hearts of his redeemed that we simply cannot overtake the Light. Rather, the Light completely overtakes us! As it was in the old creation, so it is in the new. God says, *"Let there be light,"* and there is light (Genesis 1:1-3).

"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 any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." With those words the Apostle John was inspired to begin his Gospel, showing us the eternal Christ, *"Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen!"*

Chapter 4

“A Man Sent from God”

“There was a man sent from God, whose name [was] John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all [men] through him might believe. He was not that Light, but [was sent] to bear witness of that Light. [That] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 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. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

(John 1:6-14)

Find a man sent from God, and you have found a man you would be wise to hear. Find a man sent from God, and you have found a man just like any other man, sinful, weak, and in constant need of grace, and yet a man unlike any man. Find a man sent from God, and you will have found a prophet, a messenger of God to your soul.

A Man Sent

The *first* thing set before us in this portion of Holy Scripture is “*a man sent from God.*” John begins his Gospel narrative by declaring that Jesus Christ is God our Creator, asserting without explanation that the Man Christ Jesus is the eternal God (vv. 1-5). Having declared our Savior’s eternality and eternal Godhead, showing him to be the Creator of all things, the source of all life, and the Light of the world, John proceeds to introduce us to John the Baptist and his ministry. This prophet, John the Baptist, is held before us as an exemplary gospel preacher. Like John the Baptist, every true gospel preacher is “*a man sent from God.*”

Here is a divinely inspired description of every man sent from God. — He is sent “*for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*”

Preachers are not priests. They are not mediators between God and men. Christ alone is our Priest and Mediator. Gospel preachers are not social workers, psycho-therapists, counselors, educators, or religious cheerleaders. And they certainly are not trained religious parrots, who simply repeat what they have heard others say! Those men who are sent of God are witnesses. They are sent to bear testimony to God’s truth, as first-hand witnesses, telling what they know by personal experience.

A man I know very well, after preaching the gospel for nearly thirty years, began to alter his doctrine. He sent out what he called “a clarification.” This is what he said about the message he once preached. — “What I might have said or written in the past was because others said it.” That man who is sent of God does not parrot what others have said. He bears witness to that

which he has seen for himself and knows for himself, by personal experience. That is precisely what John the Apostle said about John the Baptist here; and that is exactly what he says about himself in the opening verses of 1st John 1 (1 John 1:1-3).

Specifically, that man who is sent of God bears witness to this blessed revelation of grace: — The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Savior of men, the only Light through whom lost sinners believe. That is what Peter did on the day of Pentecost. — *“With many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation”* (Acts 2:40). That is what Paul tells us about his preaching. — He preached, *“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 20:21).

Gospel preachers testify what they know by the Word of God, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and their own experience of grace, bearing faithful witness to Christ. Any preacher who does not bear faithful witness to Christ in all the fulness of his person and work is not sent of God. So long as the preacher bears faithful witness of the Light, so long as he faithfully preaches Jesus Christ and him crucified, he performs his work faithfully. His preaching is honoring to God and is honored by God, whether those who hear him believe or do not believe (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).

The preacher’s object in preaching is *“that all men through Christ might believe.”* The words *“all men”* must be understood in a limited sense. They do not refer to every person in the world. Obviously, the Spirit of God does not intend for us to understand that there is the possibility that every person in the world might believe. Some were already in hell when John came preaching. They could not believe. Those who never hear the gospel cannot believe. And those to whom the Spirit of God is not given cannot believe.

The words *“all men”* simply refer to all classes of men. We preach the gospel to all men for the salvation of God’s elect scattered among all men. The gospel of Christ is the means by which God the Holy Spirit gives chosen, redeemed sinners life and faith in Christ (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

Yet, no man can preach the gospel effectually, in the power of the Spirit, except he be sent of God. — *“How shall they preach, except they be sent?”* (Romans 10:13-17) I ask you to pray for me and for our brethren around the world that, having been sent of God, we may be sent every time we stand to preach, that we may, like those of old, *“be filled with the Holy Ghost and speak as the Spirit gives us utterance.”* As you send your pastor out to do the work of an evangelist, pray for him, *“that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel”* (Ephesians 6:19), *“that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ”* (Colossians 4:3).

Verse 8 might seem to be a redundant statement. — *“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”* But the sad fact is, many treat preachers as though they were Christ himself. There was an ancient, heretical sect which held that John the Baptist was the Messiah. Some in his own day presumed that the Baptist prophet was the Christ. Therefore, he said in verse 20, *“I am not the Christ!”* You may think, *“No one today would be that foolish.”* — But multitudes are! Papists treat the pope and their priests as if they were themselves Christs.

Multitudes of Protestants treat preachers and religious leaders as though they were Christs. And many Baptists are just as guilty, treating preachers as if they were Christs.

What is a preacher? Ask any true prophet, and he will tell you plainly. — *“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord”* (v. 23; Isaiah 40:3). Does anyone ask, “What is a preacher?” I like the answer I heard Bro. Scott Richardson give to that question many, many years ago. — “A preacher is a nobody sent to tell everybody about somebody who can save anybody.”

Christ the Light

In verse nine the Holy Spirit tells us, as he did in verse 4, that Christ is the Light. — *“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”*

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world — The Light. Twice our Savior declared, *“I am the Light of the world”* (John 8:12; 9:5). Christ is that Light of whom all gospel preachers bear witness. He is the Light and the fountain of all light to all creatures. He is the true Light, in distinction from typical lights of the Mosaic, Levitical ceremonies in the Old Testament. Christ the Light gave light to the dark earth in the beginning, and spoke light out of darkness. Christ the Light is the Light of all men, *“which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”*

Both the light of reason and the light of conscience come from Christ. All natural light and understanding comes from him. But the light of nature, of reason, and of conscience, while sufficient to render all without excuse before God (Romans 1:18-20), is not and never can be spiritual, saving light. The Lord Jesus warns us plainly and solemnly that the light that is in men by nature, as it relates to spiritual things, is utter darkness (Matthew 6:23; Luke 11:35; John 3:18-21).

When John says that Christ *“lighteth every man that cometh into the world,”* it is obvious that he is talking about natural, not spiritual light. I say that is obvious, because all men do not have spiritual light. But if you do, if you have light in your soul, if you possess the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, if you have the light of life, and grace, and salvation, it is because Christ has given it to you by the gospel. And whatever light you have regarding the things of God is the gift of Christ, the Light.

God “hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

Unknown by the World

Third, in verses 10 and 11 John tells us that Christ, who is the Light of the world, is completely unknown by the world. — *“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world*

knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Read those five statements just as they stand in this chapter. John is not here describing our Lord’s earthly life and ministry. These five rich and instructive statements illustrate and explain the glorious things John has been declaring in the first nine verses of this chapter about our Savior.

1. “*He was in the world.*” — When was he in the world? This does not refer to our Lord’s incarnation. John speaks of that in verse 14. This statement, “*He was in the world,*” speaks of a past existence in the world. It is written, as A. T. Robertson points out, in the “imperfect tense of continuous existence in the universe before the incarnation as in verses 1 and 2.” — “The word ‘*was*’ denotes past existence in the world, even all the time past from the creation of the world” (John Gill). When was he in the world? He was in the world from all eternity. He was not in the world in his human nature, for the world had not yet been created by him and he had not yet become flesh. And it cannot be understood that John refers to him being in the world merely in his divine nature, because that would have been a needless observation. But he was in the world when in his covenant character he was set up from everlasting, and when Jehovah possessed him (as he himself states it), “*from the beginning or ever the earth was*” as our Surety and Mediator, when he stood up in the counsel chambers of eternity as our Wisdom, “*Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth*” and delighting himself in his chosen (Proverbs 8:22-31). Then we read...
2. “*And the world was made by him.*” — This is exactly what John told us in verse 3. — “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*” Hebrews 11:3).
3. “*And the world knew him not.*” — By the sin and fall of our father Adam, the whole human race was plunged into darkness and “*knew him not*” (Psalm 14:1-2; 10:4). The world knew him not as their Creator. The world refused to acknowledge the mercies they received from him. The world refused to worship, serve, obey, love, and fear him as God.
4. Then we read, “*He came unto his own.*” — The words might be read, “He came unto his own people,” referring not to his elect and redeemed people, who shall be made willing in the day of his power and shall receive him (Psalm 110:3; John 6:37), but I am more inclined to think the Holy Spirit is referring to his own physical people, the Jews, to whom he gave the law, the prophets, the service of God, and the promises. Throughout the Old Testament “*he came unto his own,*” to the Jewish people, before his incarnation. He came in the types and pictures given to the nation of Israel. He came in promises and prophecies, and in the word and ordinances of the Old Testament. He came to them personally, in person, as he did to Moses in the burning bush. He came in person to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt on the night of the passover. The Lord Jesus himself came and redeemed them with a mighty hand and a outstretched arm; and in his love and pity he led them through the Red Sea as on dry ground and through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He came to them in person at Mount Sinai, and gave them the oracles of God. He came in person to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Gideon, Manoah, and his wife, to Daniel in the lion’s den, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace. Throughout the days of the Old

Testament, *“he came unto his own.”*

5. *“And his own received him not.”* — They did not believe in him and refused to obey his voice. They rebelled against him and tempted him often. They provoked him to anger and vexed and grieved his Holy Spirit. They despised his prophets, generation after generation. Then, after he came into the world, the Jews despised him and his Gospel, fulfilling their own Scriptures by their rejection of him (Hosea 9:17; Acts 13:27).

Oh, how wicked, how desperately wicked the heart of man is! Christ was in the world invisibly, long before the Word was made flesh. He was in the world from the very beginning, ruling, ordering, and governing the whole creation, *“upholding all things by the word of his power.”* He gave to all life and breath, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. By him kings reigned and nations were increased or diminished. Yet, *“the world knew him not,”* and honored him not. They *“worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator”* (Romans 1:25).

Then, when the Son of God came visibly into the world, when he was born at Bethlehem, he fared no better. He came to the very people he had brought out of Egypt, to the Jews, whom he had separated from other nations, and to whom he had revealed himself by the prophets. He came to those very Jews who read of him every sabbath day in their synagogues, and professed to be waiting for his coming. And yet, when he came, they received him not, but crucified him!

But there is far greater proof of the wickedness and depravity of the human heart than all of that. — How often the Lord Jesus Christ has come to you by the Gospel, being *“evidently set forth, crucified among you”* (Galatians 3:1). Yet, you obstinately refuse to obey the truth, and receive him not! To such unbelieving rebels he says, in Lamentations 1:12, — *“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.”*

Another People

Fourth, John tells us about another people. The Jewish nation refused him; but the purpose of God is not thwarted (Romans 3:3-4). Blessed be his name, there is another people, a spiritual seed, who are his people by election and redemption, a people who shall be willing and shall receive him in the day of his power. — *“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”* (v. 12).

Saving faith is here spoken of as receiving Christ. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to receive him, to reach out and take him for your own. That is what the word *“receive”* means: — take. We receive him as the Word of God. We receive him as God our Savior. We receive him as our Lord and Redeemer. We receive grace out of his fulness. We receive pardon, forgiveness, righteousness, and an inheritance among the sons of God by his blood. We receive life by his death. Receiving him, we receive all by him and with him and in him! — *“Christ is all and in all!”*

Who are these many who receive him? The Scriptures tell us plainly. They are the many, out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue, who were ordained unto eternal life (Acts 13:48),

the many who were redeemed by his precious blood (Isaiah 53:10-12), the many whom the Lord our God shall call by his Spirit (Psalm 65:4; Acts 2:39).

Blessedness of Faith

Look at verse 12 again. Here is a brief description of the blessedness of faith in Christ. — *“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.”*

Several years ago, one of the men in our congregation asked me about this statement: — *“To them gave he power to become the sons of God.”* He asked, “Does that word ‘power’ mean ability or authority? I answered, “Yes.” It means ability and authority. This is not the word translated power in Romans 1:16. This is a different word altogether. In Romans 1:16 the word translated “power” means “mighty ability, violent strength, or abundant might.” It is the word from which we get our word “dynamite.” The gospel of Christ is the mighty, explosive, violent power of God unto salvation.

The word translated power here means both “authority and ability.” It is similar to our word “exercise.” It has the idea of putting something to use, or of putting something into operation, by right and with skill and ability (John 5:27; 17:2). As the Lord Jesus Christ has been given power (the right and authority) to execute judgment with skill and ability, and to govern the universe, so the Lord Jesus gives to every believing sinner the power (the right to execute with skill and ability) his adoption. We were adopted in eternity and named the children of God in election before the worlds were made; but now, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are the sons of God, and have every right (the authority and ability) to call God our Father (1 John 3:1-2; Galatians 4:6-7; Colossians 1:12-14).

We who believe are *“the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:26). All who trust Christ are, as J. C. Ryle wrote, “born again by a new and heavenly birth, and adopted into the family of the King of kings. Few in number, and despised by the world as they are, they are cared for with infinite love by a Father in heaven, who, for his Son’s sake, is well pleased with them. In time he provides them with everything that is for their good. In eternity he will give them a crown of glory that fades not away.” These are great things, privileges beyond expression! But faith in Christ gives sinners like us the right to possess them.

New Birth

This faith we have in Christ is the result of the new birth, the result of being born again by God the Holy Spirit. Here in verse 13 we are told in no uncertain terms that the new birth, by which God gives us faith in Christ, is altogether the gift of God. *“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

The new birth has nothing to do with who our parents may or may not be. It is *“not of blood.”* It does not come by family descent. Having Abraham for your father does not give you a step up toward God. Nothing derived by human generation from our depraved fathers, nothing arising out of the corrupt stock of a fallen race can contribute anything to spiritual life. The new

birth, and that faith in Christ which comes with it is not something we obtain by “*the will of the flesh*,” by the exercise of our imaginary free will (Romans 9:16). And this new birth is not something one man can will to another. It is not by “*the will of man*.” Abraham desired it for Ishmael, and prayed for God to let Ishmael live before him; but he could not will Ishmael into life and salvation. David desired it for Absalom, but Absalom still perished. No father or mother can will a son or daughter into life! No man can will, or talk, or persuade, or scare a dead sinner into life and faith in Christ.

All who are born again are born again by the sovereign, eternal, irresistible will “*of God*”. All who receive Christ, all who trust him believe by “*the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead*” (Ephesians 1:19-20). Oh, how great, how precious, how wonderful is God’s saving grace and distinguishing mercy to poor sinners!

“Sons we are, through God’s election,
Who in Jesus Christ believe;
By eternal destination,
Saving grace we now receive.
Our Redeemer, our Redeemer
Does both grace and glory give!

Every soul of man, by sinning,
Merits everlasting pain;
But God’s love, without beginning,
Formed and fixed salvation’s plan.
Chosen sinners, (countless millions!),
Shall with Christ in glory reign!

Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder!
Ask, ‘O why such love to me?’
Grace has put me in the number
Of the Savior’s family!
I will glory, I will glory
Only in the Lord my God!”

Would you be numbered among the sons of God? Receive Christ. — “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!*” Oh, may God give you faith in his dear Son, faith to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

“*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” In order to save such things as we are, the Son of God took on himself our humanity, dwelt among us, and laid down his life as the sinners’ Substitute, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him! Now, believing on him, we behold “*his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” This faith in Christ is the blessed gift of grace, begotten in us by the preached gospel (1 Peter 1:23-25), by a man sent from God (Isaiah 52:7-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Chapter 5

Have you seen his glory?

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Have you seen the glory of Christ? When Philip went down to Samaria *“he preached Christ unto them, and there was great joy in that city.”* Why do you suppose the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified”?* Without question, he made that determination because Jesus Christ crucified is the message of Holy Scripture. Paul was determined to preach Jesus Christ crucified to all men everywhere, because the only thing in the world that can give peace to the souls of men is *“Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*

Poor, lost sinners vainly imagine that they must find something good in themselves before they can trust the Savior. What a sad, foolish thing! They seek rest where no rest can ever be found: their good works, their feelings, their experience, their religious duties, their remorse over sin, even their faith! They make a refuge of lies that must be swept away. They lay on a bed that is too short to stretch themselves upon. They wrap themselves in coverings too narrow to cover. And they wonder why they cannot find rest for their souls!

There is no place of rest for our souls, but Jesus Christ crucified. There is nothing in this world that can give us rest, except a sight of the crucified Lamb of God. If you would have rest, you must get a sight of the glory of Christ, *“the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* John 1:14 is a text so deep and full that I approach it with fear and trembling, lest I misstate that which is here revealed. Yet, I am certain that if the Lord God will, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, enable you to behold the glory of Christ you will be blessed with rest in your soul. — *“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”*

The Tabernacle

John here compares Christ to that which was the greatest glory of the Jewish Church. Let me read it, giving another translation, the NKJV: *“And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth.”* The word *“dwelt”* in our translation comes from the Greek word for *“tabernacle.”* When the Son of God became flesh, he tabernacled among us.

In the Jewish Church of the Old Testament its greatest glory was the fact that God tabernacled in its midst. God did not dwell (tabernacle) in the tent of Moses, or in the tents of the princes of Israel, but in the tabernacle in the wilderness. There God dwelt; and that tabernacle was Israel's glory. They had God himself in their midst. The tabernacle was a tent to which men went when they would commune with God. It was the place to which God came manifestly when he would commune with man. There God and his chosen people met each other through the slaughter of bullocks and lambs. It was there in the tabernacle that the two (God and man) were

reconciled.

All of this pointed to and was typical of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's human body is God's tabernacle; and it is in Christ that God meets with man, and in Christ that man has dealings with God. As the ancient Jews went to God's tent in the center of the camp to worship, so we come to Christ to worship the triune God. If the Jew would be released from any ceremonial uncleanness by which he was polluted and ceremonially separated from his God, he went up to the sanctuary of God, the tabernacle. There he found cleansing by the sacrifice God required, and peace was restored between God and his soul. So, too, you and I, being washed in the precious blood of Christ, have access with boldness unto God, even the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is our Tabernacle and the Tabernacle of God among men.

The Shekinah

Follow the parallel a little further. The greatest glory of the tabernacle was the most holy place. There stood in the most holy place the Ark of the Covenant, with its golden lid called the mercy-seat. Over the mercy-seat stood the cherubim, whose wings met each other, as they looked downward toward the mercy-seat. Rising above the mercy-seat, there was a bright light called "the Shekinah." That light represented the continual, abiding presence of God in the tabernacle. Immediately above that light stood a pillar of fire by night, and by day a spiral column of cloud. The cloud expanded over all the camp of Israel and shielded God's chosen people from the broiling sun. The Shekinah was glory.

Here in John 1:14 God the Holy Spirit declares that the incarnate Christ is God's Tabernacle; and John says, "*we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*" I am not simply telling you what Christ was. I am declaring what he is. Our Lord Jesus Christ is himself God; and he is God's Tabernacle, "*the true Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*" (Hebrews 8:2), "*for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*" In this Tabernacle, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have and we behold the Shekinah, the glory of God.

Grace and Truth

Here is the great, surpassing excellence of Christ the true Tabernacle, by which he wondrously excels the typical tabernacle of the Old Testament. He is "*full of grace and truth.*" The Jewish tabernacle was full of law. Its rites and ceremonies foreshadowed and typified of grace; but those typical sacrifices, repeated continually, did nothing to remove sin and guilt. As with all the law, all they could do was remind the people of their sin and guilt. That is what the Holy Spirit tells us in the opening verses of Hebrews 10.

"Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;

A Sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.

Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing redeeming love!"

The old tabernacle had a barrier, a wall, a thick veil that separated God and man. That veil represented the law of God we have broken. The worshippers of old, as they came to the tabernacle, were reminded of their sin and guilt, and could never enter into the presence of God in the most holy place behind the veil. But in Christ, the true Tabernacle, there is no separating veil. He destroyed the barrier separating his people from God by fulfilling and satisfying God's law. Now, as I said before, we draw near to God by faith in his blood, with full assurance, because Christ is "*full of grace*" (Hebrews 10:19-22).

How I love those words "*full of grace!*" — There is not a little grace in him, or much grace in him; but such a rich abundance of grace is treasured up in the Lord Jesus that he is "*full of grace!*" In him all fulness dwells!

The old tabernacle was full of imagery, and shadows, and symbols, and pictures, and types; but Christ, the true Tabernacle, is "*full of truth.*" Christ is the substance, not the picture, — the reality, not the shadow. Here is our great joy. Coming to Christ, we come to the true Tabernacle of God. We come not to the Shekinah that represented the glory of God, but to him who is the glory of the God. We come not to the representation of grace, but to him who is Grace. We come not to the shadow of truth, but to him who is the Truth, by which our souls are accepted of God.

Have you come to Christ? Have you beheld his glory? Are you numbered among those who can say with John, — "*We beheld his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

The Incarnate Word

First, the Apostle speaks of the incarnate Word. If there is any verse in the Bible marked with the special emphasis by God the Holy Spirit, surely this is one. Every word is of immense

importance. Here is the glorious person so highly spoken of in the preceding 13 verses of this chapter. The Word is declared to be “*made flesh.*” The Son of God was “*made flesh.*”

The word translated “*flesh*” is very strong. It is the same word used in Romans 3:20, where we are told no flesh can be justified by the deeds of the law. In Romans 8:3 Christ is said to have been made “*in the likeness of sinful flesh.*” The word here translated “*flesh*” has the same significance as the Hebrew words used in Genesis 6:12 to speak of “*corrupt*” flesh. John could not have used a stronger, more emphatic word to speak of our Savior’s great condescension and humiliation in assuming of our nature. Had John merely said, “*the Word was made man,*” the meaning would not have been so emphatic a declaration of degradation. (Philippians 2:5-8).

“*The Word was made flesh!*” — The Son of God was made what we are, made to be our full nature, body and soul, a complete man. He who is God became man. He did not cease to be God; but he took our human nature into union with his Divine nature, so that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man, the God-man, our Mediator. “*The Word was made flesh,*” as Augustine put it in the 4th century, “Not by changing what he was, but by taking what he was not.” This union of God and man in one person is indissolvable and forever. Jesus Christ our Savior, our God-man Mediator is “*the same yesterday, and today, and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

I have no idea what the length, breadth, height or depth of what I am about to say is; but I cannot help linking these words to those of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:30. — “*The Word was made flesh;*” and “*we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!*” So is it now, so it has been in all ages of the Church, and so shall be forever.

The Favored People

Second, John describes a favored people. — “*And we beheld his glory.*” Who are these favored people? They are an elect people, a chosen company. The Lord Jesus said, “*I know whom I have chosen.*” He said, “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.*” He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but they who did receive him are described as people who were “*born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” The elect in Christ’s day, though they were but a small remnant, nevertheless did exist. There were but few who followed him; but there were a few who followed the Lamb whithersoever he went. The “*we,*” then who beheld Christ’s glory were a chosen company. So it was then, and so it is now. Thank God for his electing love! Those who behold his glory are those who were chosen from eternity to behold his glory (Acts 13:48). And those who behold his glory here shall behold his glory forever in the world to come (John 17:24).

Those who behold Christ’s glory are a graciously called people. We behold his glory because we have been specifically called by him to behold his glory. — “*He calleth unto him whom he would*” (Mark 3:13). — “*He calleth his own sheep by name*” (John 10:3). It is written of those he delivers from going down to the pit, “*His life shall see the light*” (Job 33:28). — “*Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD*” (Psalm 40:3). — “*They shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God*” (Isaiah 35:2).

The Son of God calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. If you and I behold

Christ's glory, it is because he has called us to himself; and that call is the result of his election of us unto salvation.

These who behold his glory are also a Divinely illuminated people. If others do not see what we see, and we are as blind as they by nature, our seeing his glory must be because of something he has done for us, and not because of anything in us or done by us (2 Corinthians 4:6). C. H. Spurgeon said...

“None of the princes of this world knew him. The priests who had studied the law could not discover him; the members of the Sanhedrim, who were under some expectation of his advent, could not perceive him. In vain the star in the east; in vain the miraculous appearance of angels to the shepherds; the blind generation would not perceive him. In vain the opening of blind eyes and the preaching of the gospel to the poor; in vain the raising of the dead; in vain all those innumerable signs and wonders; they could not perceive his glory; but of those who did perceive it it may be said, as of Simon Barjonas, *‘Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee.’*”

“Blessed are your eyes, for they see!” — None believe in Christ but those who are his sheep. No man comes unto him except the Father who sent him draws them; and none ever perceive him but those whose eyes are opened by his own healing fingers. Do you behold his glory? If so, beloved, it is because he chose you, he called you, and he illuminated you by his grace.

The Thing Revealed

Third, John speaks about the thing revealed. — *“We beheld his glory.”* — *“We beheld.”* The text does not say, we heard about his glory, we read about his glory, but *“we beheld his glory.”* What a privilege that is!

This is much more than a physical, carnal vision of the Lord Jesus. Many saw him with the eyes of their heads who never saw him with the eye of faith, who never beheld his glory. And many today behold him with the eye of carnal reason, who never behold his glory, because they do not know him and do not behold him by faith, not having him revealed in them by the Spirit of God.

When John says, *“We beheld his glory,”* he is saying the very same thing Peter said when he wrote, *“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”* (2 Peter 1:16). He is talking about that which he, with Peter and James, beheld on the Mount of Transfiguration. Christ was transfigured before them. They saw him as he now appears in heaven, glorified with the glory he had with the Father before the world was. They saw the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's Substitute who accomplished redemption by his death upon the cursed tree (Luke 9:28-31).

“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was white and* glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:28-31)

The word “*decease*” in Luke 9:31 is literally the word “exodus.” These disciples beheld his glory upon the mount, the very same glory that is revealed to us by the saving operations of his Spirit. By the death he accomplished, he fulfilled the law and the prophets, he pleased the Father (Matthew 17:5), he obtained eternal redemption, he earned the right to be Lord as our Mediator, he revealed the glory of God as “*a just God and a Savior*” (Isaiah 45:20-22). In Christ crucified God sent forth “*his mercy and his truth*” from heaven and saved us (Psalms 57:3; 85:10; 115:1; Proverbs 3:3; 16:6, Micah 7:20).

I ask you again, have you seen his glory? Have you beheld the glory of Christ by the Spirit’s gift of faith? If you would behold his glory, he says, “*Look unto me!*” Look and you will see. He does not say, work for me, but “*look unto me.*” He does not say, figure me out, but “*look unto me.*” He does not say, serve me, but “*look unto me.*” He does not say, feel after me, but “*look unto me.*” He does not even say, pray to me, but “*look unto me.*” Look away to Christ and, looking, you will behold his glory.

Trusting Christ, we see his glory, just as Isaiah did, “*the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (Isaiah 6:1-7). It is by faith, only by faith that we behold his glory (John 11:40). Trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, we behold his glory in redemption, in the saving operations of his grace, and in his providence!

The Blessed Vision

Fourth, John describes the blessed vision before us, as we behold the glory of our Savior. It is just this: — “*The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” What glory we have before us, as we behold the glory of Christ by faith! It is...

- The Glory of His Wonderful Person — God and Man!
- The Glory of His Perfect Righteousness as Our Representative!
- The Glory of His Sin-atonement Sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:21)!
- The Glory of His Sovereign Dominion!
- The Glory of Tender, Sympathizing Humanity!
- The Glory of His Heavenly Intercession (1 John 2:1-2).
- The Glory of His Persevering Love (John 13:1)!
- The Glory of His Final Triumph (Revelation 19:1-6)!

The Witness Given

Fifth, one reason why the Lord God has so graciously given us grace to behold his glory is that we might bear testimony to others of his glory as “*eye witnesses of his majesty*” (1 John 1:1-3). As soon as Isaiah beheld his glory, the Lord God said to that sinner whose lips still burned with

the purging fire of his altar, “*Go tell this people!*” That is what we must do. — Proclaim the Glory! Jesus Christ is the only Savior of poor sinners. He is the only begotten of the Father. He is full of grace!

“Plenteous grace with him is found, —
Grace to cover all my sin:
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is full of truth! He is Truth! He is the Truth of all the Prophets, all the Law, and all the Promises of God!

“All hail Immanuel, all divine
In Thee Thy Father’s glories shine;
Thou brightest, sweetest, Fairest One,
That eyes have seen or angels known.

O may I live to reach the place
Where He unveils His lovely face.
Where all His beauties saints behold,
And sing His name to harps of gold!”

Have you beheld his glory? Oh, may God give you grace to behold his glory from this day forth and forever more! — “*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*”

Chapter 6

God's Jubilee Message

“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. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 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 1:15-18)

We read about the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Every forty-ninth year God required the nation of Israel to begin a year long sabbath called, “*The Year of Jubilee.*” Every 50th year was a sabbatical year.

In the Old Testament everything revolved around the sabbath. At the end of creation, the Lord God rested on the seventh day, the sabbath. In the giving of the law the Lord commanded Israel to keep the sabbath day holy. But, did you ever notice how many sabbath days the Lord required the children of Israel to keep? He required them to keep a seventh day sabbath, a seventh week (50th day) sabbath, a seventh year sabbath, and a 50th year sabbath.

This 50th year sabbath, “*The Year of Jubilee,*” was, like everything else in the law, typical and prophetic of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Sabbath, salvation in him, and of the gospel of God's free grace. This Year of Jubilee was a season appointed by God during which the children of Israel were required to adjust their social affairs once every fifty years, setting their brethren free from bondage and free from all debt, and restoring lost possessions, lost property, and lost inheritances to those who had lost them. It portrayed and typified the great work of our Lord Jesus Christ in restoring chosen sinners to God and to one another, and bringing us at last into that great sabbath of eternal rest in “*the glorious liberty of the sons of God.*” To many throughout the land the year of jubilee was “*the accepted time*” and “*the day of salvation.*”

The year of jubilee was announced by the blowing of a trumpet throughout all the land. That is, of course, a representation of gospel preaching (Isaiah 27:13; Psalm 89:15). Blessed are those ears that have been made to hear the joyful sound of God's free grace, of God's great, free, everlasting salvation in Christ!

Four Trumpets

There were four distinct and special sounds of the trumpet in the camp of Israel. Each one distinctly portrayed the preaching of the gospel. Memorial trumpets were sounded to announce the new moon and call the people together in a joyful assembly of worship (Leviticus 23:24; Psalm 81:3). Battle trumpets, trumpets of war (Judges 3:27) were sounded to gather the people to battle (1 Corinthians 14:8). Trumpets of alarm warned men of impending judgment and called them to repentance (Joel 2:1). And the jubilee trumpet announced the beginning of that joyous year of restoration (Leviticus 25:9).

The jubilee trumpet was different from the others. This trumpet's sound was never heard except once every fifty years. Yet, its sound was so sweet and so distinct that no poor captive in the land of Israel was at a moment's loss to know its music and its gracious meaning.

That is just exactly the way it is when God the Holy Spirit causes a poor, needy, captive sinner to hear the gospel, when he proclaims pardon to the guilty, pardon by the blood of Christ, he causes the sinner to understand that atonement has been made and accepted. At that very moment, jubilee commences. The soul long held captive to sin to Satan, and to the law is set free and walks and dances in liberty. What a joyful sound! What a joyful day! When the gospel jubilee trumpet sounds in the soul, the acceptable year of the Lord begins (Isaiah 61:1-2; 63:4).

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!

He breaks the power of cancelled sin
And sets the prisoners free!
His blood can make the foulest clean—
His blood availed for me!

The Jubilee Trumpet

The jubilee trumpet, like the gospel of Christ, proclaimed seven things, seven things that sound like heavenly music in the sinner's ear.

1. **Atonement** — The jubilee trumpet was to be sounded on the day of atonement (Leviticus 25:9). That is where gospel preaching always begins. The gospel has not been preached until atonement has been proclaimed. There can be no joyful sound apart from the sin-atonement blood of Christ. The jubilee trumpet declared atonement blood shed, atonement blood accepted, atonement finished. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was delivered unto death under the wrath of God because he was made sin for us and our sins were imputed to him. He was raised again the third day because our justification was accomplished, because our sins were forever put away!
2. **Liberty** — The Year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, and it began with the proclamation of liberty, liberty according to the very demands of God's holy law (Leviticus 25:10). Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us plainly that he is the Liberator and the One who proclaims liberty (Luke 4:17-21). Be sure you do not miss this. — The liberty proclaimed in the year of jubilee, the liberty proclaimed in the gospel is the blessed liberty of grace; but it is liberty demanded by God's holy law. Unlike the other ceremonies of the Levitical law, this law concerning the Year of Jubilee was given at Sinai, at the very time God gave the law to Moses (Leviticus 25:1). The law of God, being totally satisfied by the blood of our Substitute, demands the liberty of every redeemed sinner. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:20-21).

3. **Forgiveness** — The Year of Jubilee was a time of forgiveness (Leviticus 25:35). The poor wretch who had lost everything, who had incurred such a tremendous load of debt that he sold his land, then his house, and at last sold himself into bondage, when the jubilee trumpet sounded was released from bondage and released from debt, forgiven completely, freely, and forever. His debt did not bar him from the joy of jubilee. His debt qualified him as the one for whom the trumpet sounded. Hear me, now. — I am sent to preach the gospel, to blow the jubilee trumpet, to the poor.

“Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call!”

4. **Rest** — The Year of Jubilee was a year of rest (Leviticus 25:3-5). The gospel of Christ is a proclamation of rest, calling weary sinners to rest, promising eternal rest (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:1-11; Psalm 116:7; Galatians 5:1-4).
5. **Bounty** — The Year of Jubilee was a year of great, unparalleled bounty. — “*Ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety*” (Leviticus 25:19). Oh, what a gospel this is! In Christ we are made to dwell in complete safety in a land of infinite bounty. Here we lie down in green pastures and fear no evil. Our treasury is the unsearchable riches of Christ. “*All things are yours, for ye are Christ’s!*” We who have been brought by the grace of God into the liberty of the gospel have been brought into his fulness. Let us therefore be careful for nothing, but in all things give thanks.
6. **Restoration** — In the Year of Jubilee every man who had lost his inheritance had it returned to him in total, free and clear, with no mortgage of any kind, no lien of any kind against it (Leviticus 25:13). All that we lost in Adam, Christ has restored. All that we lost by our own willful rebellion and sin, Christ has restored. David understood this. He sang, “*He restoreth my soul!*” We who “*were by nature children of wrath, even as others,*” are now made to be “*heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ!*”
7. **Brotherly Love** — In the Year of Jubilee the children of Israel were required by law to love their brethren. — “*Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God*” (Leviticus 25:17). In the gospel jubilee saved sinners are constrained and taught by grace to love one another. “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” — Have I been loved freely? Let me love freely. — Have I been forgiven freely? Let me forgive freely. We read in Matthew 18 of a forgiven servant who took his fellow servant by the throat and demanded payment on the spot. He was obviously bold enough to deal with the man face to face; but he was utterly destitute of the grace, compassion, and forgiveness he had experienced from his master. — Have I received freely? Let me give freely.

Do you know who began preaching at the beginning of the very last Jubilee? It was John the Baptist, who was sent of God to proclaim that the year of the Lord had come, to tell sinners that he who would perform all that was promised, typified, and hoped for in the Year of Jubilee, the Lamb of God, had come!

The Baptist's Witness

As the Year of Jubilee began, *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."* In verse 15 we have John the Apostle's description of the ministry of John the Baptist. He describes John's whole work as that of a witness. Here is the Baptist's witness. — *"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 bare witness of him." — That is what a preacher does. He bears witness of the Savior. He tells what he knows. We bear witness of him, the Lord Jesus, not of a doctrine, but of him, not of a denomination, but of him, not of a theological system, but of him! Like John the Baptist, God's servants are sent *"for a witness, to bear witness of the Light"* (v. 7). Faithful men bear faithful witness of him who loved us and gave himself for us.

"John bare witness of him, and cried." — As the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3), John the Baptist came crying like the crier sent to blow the jubilee trumpet when atonement was made and the Year of Jubilee began. John cried. That is what the preacher does. He cries, "Redemption is done! Justice is satisfied! Sin is put away!" They cry with earnest zeal and fervency, "Repent, for repentance, the turning of sinners to God by the blood of Christ is accomplished!" They cry, "This is the Christ!" — *"This was he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me."* Christ came into the world six months after John the Baptist; and he came after him to be baptized by him. But he was before him. He is the eternal God. The Christ is preferred before him, preferred before John, preferred before Moses, any of the prophets, any apostle, any preacher, any man, any angel, or anything (Colossians 1:18-19).

The Redeemer's Fulness

"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (v. 16). — All fulness is in Christ. That is God's jubilee message. All fulness is in Christ as our Mediator. It is in him for us. Everything we lost in the sin and fall of our father Adam has been recovered for us by Christ and is found in him. It is Christ, and Christ alone who supplies all the needs of our souls. — *"Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."*

There is an infinite fullness in our Savior! — *"It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell."* — *"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* — *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him"* (Colossians 1:19, 2:3, 9-10). There is in the Lord Jesus Christ a boundless, infinite supply of grace for poor, needy sinners, exceeding great riches of grace for time and eternity! — *"His Fulness!"* What a thought! — *"His fulness"* is all fulness. All the fulness of...

- God's Love, Mercy, and Grace!
- God's Purpose, Providence, and Promises!
- God's Greatness, Goodness, and Glory!
- God's Purity, Prudence, and Power!
- God's Wisdom, Will, and Work!

- God's Righteousness, Redemption, and Revelation!

"Of his fullness have we all received." — All we who were chosen in him, redeemed by him, called to him, born of him, and given faith in him, all God's elect, every heaven born soul, every believing sinner has received, is receiving, and shall receive of his fullness by the gift of God's grace, by the operation of God's power, and by the hand of faith.

"Of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace." — In Christ we have received, from his boundless fulness, grace because of grace.

- Redeeming grace because of electing grace!
- Regenerating grace because of redeeming grace!
- Sanctifying grace because of regenerating grace!
- Believing grace because of sanctifying grace!
- Persevering grace because of preserving grace!
- Grace in time because of grace in eternity!
- Experimental grace because of covenant grace!
- Pardoning grace because of promised grace!
- Imparted grace because of imputed grace!
- Everlasting grace because of everlasting grace!
- The fulness of grace because of the freeness of grace!
- Heaps of grace upon heaps of grace!

"Of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace." Blessed be his name forever!

The Savior's Supremacy

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." — The opening word of verse 17, *"for,"* connects this with what we have just seen. We have received grace for grace out of the fulness of Christ our Redeemer and Mediator for this reason. — *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

Be sure you get this. — That which the law commands, grace bestows. God's promise runs side by side with his precept. Indeed, grace turns precepts into promises and promises into performances. This is our Savior's great supremacy over Moses. It was he who gave the law by Moses, and he who fulfilled the law by grace. The law he gave demanded righteousness. The grace he performed brought in righteousness, complete justification. The law he gave demanded satisfaction. The grace he performed gave satisfaction, perfect redemption. The law he gave demanded our death. The grace he performed accomplished death for us, substitutionary atonement. The law he gave demanded holiness. The grace he performs gives holiness, perfect sanctification in regeneration. And all this grace, by which the Lord Jesus has magnified the law and made it honorable, in the everlasting salvation of his people was done in truth, without the least compromise of God's holy law and justice (Romans 3:24-26; 8:1-4).

The Son's Declaration

Fourth, in verse 18 the Spirit of God speaks about the Son's declaration of the Father. It is in Christ alone and by Christ alone that men and women know 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.*"

God is Spirit, without form or shape, immense, infinite, and incomprehensible. No man has ever seen him or heard his voice. No man has ever been found who could know the counsel of his will, not Moses, not Elijah, not you, not me. No man was ever found worthy to take the book of his decree and loose its seals, except that man who is himself God in all his fulness, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, he who is in the bosom of the Father, because he is one with the Father.

He stood forth before the heavenly angels in the beginning as the Lamb that had been slain in the midst of the throne and took the book as our Surety. He showed himself in human form throughout the prophetic age of the Old Testament. At last, the Word was made flesh, dwelt among us, and was crucified for us. And now, in the crucified Christ the very glory of God shines forth in the redemption and salvation of his people.

That is what John 1:18 is talking about. The words "*he hath declared him*" speak of something done at one time, with finality, in the past. At Calvary, in his substitutionary accomplishments on the cross, our blessed Savior declared the Father, the triune God, in all the fulness of his Being and glory to man! That is God's jubilee message. As we blow the jubilee trumpet, as we preach the gospel, God who alone commands the light to shine out of darkness shines forth in the dark, depraved hearts of lost, condemned sinners, giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

Chapter 7

Christ's Fulness Our Inexhaustible Supply

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

John 1:16 should be understood as a continuation of John's description of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 15 is a parenthetical insertion in which John the Apostle tells us, as he did in verses 6 and 7, that John the Baptist preached the same message he preached. Read verses 14 and 16 together.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth...And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the revelation of the triune God. In him we behold the glory of the triune God. I mean by that that in his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension, his session at the right hand of God and his Second Advent, beholding him as our all-sufficient Savior, we behold his glory, *“the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* — And *“of his fulness”* all God's elect in all ages receive an inexhaustible supply of grace. That is the meaning of John's words in these two verses.

Our Glorious Savior

First, John's words direct our hearts and minds to the person of our glorious Savior himself, the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us. John Newton rightly observed...

“I am well satisfied it will not be a burden to me at the hour of death, nor be laid to my charge at the Day of Judgment, that I have thought too highly of the Lord Jesus Christ or labored too much in commending and setting Him forth to others, as the Alpha and Omega, the Lord our Righteousness, the sufficient atonement for sin, the only Mediator between God and men, the true God and eternal life. On the contrary, alas! My guilt and grief are that my thoughts of Him are so faint, so infrequent, and my commendations of Him so lamentably cold and disproportionate to what they ought to be.”

Others are mentioned here, but they are insignificant. — *“All we”* are mentioned; but we are mentioned only as receivers *“of his fulness.”* All honor is reserved for Christ alone. — *“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake”* (Psalm 115:1). — *“Of his fulness have all we received.”* Christ is, and ever must be, preeminent.

He is *“the Word,”* the Speech of God, the distinct, intelligible declaration and revelation of the eternal God, the unfolding of the Father's being, character, thoughts, will, and heart. Would you see God? Behold Christ, for he is God's Word, the Revelation of Deity. He declares, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”*

But our blessed Savior is much more than a mere word, a mere expression of God's thoughts. He is God the eternal Son, from whose fulness we receive all grace. Look at verses 1-5.

- *"In the beginning was the Word."* With those words, the Holy Spirit asserts Christ's eternity.
- *"And the Word was God."* With those words, our Savior's deity is declared.
- John also ascribes to our Savior the acts of God. — *"Without him was not anything made that was made."*
- He declares that Christ is self-existent, which is but another way of saying he is God. — *"In him was life."*
- In 1 John 1:5 John declares, *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at; all;"* and he tells us in the 9th verse of this chapter that the Word is *"the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."*

John could not have been more explicit in his declarations of the fact that he from whom we receive grace and salvation is himself God over all and blessed forever.

And the Apostle is quick to assert that he who is God our Savior is bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh, a real man. *"The Word was made flesh."* He did not merely assume our nature, but was *"made flesh."* John does not even say the Word was made a man. He says, *"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."* He pitched his tent with the sons of men. He dwelt among sinners and sufferers, among mourners and mortals, completing his pilgrimage among us by becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross.

The triune God has treasured up the fulness of his infinite grace in a person so august that heaven and earth tremble at the majesty of his presence, and yet in a person so humble that he is not ashamed to call us *"brethren."* With Joseph Hart, God's saints delight to sing...

"A Man there is, a real Man,
With wounds still gaping wide,
From which rich streams of blood once ran,
In hands, and feet, and side.

'Tis no wild fancy of our brains,
No metaphor we speak;
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns,
That suffered for our sake.

This wondrous Man of whom we tell,
Is true Almighty God;
He bought our souls from death and hell;
The price, His own heart's blood.

That human heart He still retains,
Though throned in highest bliss;
And feels each tempted member's pains;
For our affliction's His.

Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death!

His blood can cleanse the blackest soul,
And wash our guilt away;
He will present us sound and whole
In that tremendous day.”

Throughout this chapter, John purposefully takes our thoughts away from any other, and points us to Christ alone, as if to say, “Christ alone is important.” Others are mentioned, but each one as he is introduced, is immediately followed with a disclaimer. He mentions John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets, several times, but each time with a disclaimer. John came “*to bear witness of the Light*” (v. 7); but “*he was not that Light*” (v. 8). — John was the forerunner of Christ; but he declared, “*I am not the Christ*” (v. 20). Moses is mentioned (v. 17); but he bows before the Lamb of God because, though “*the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*” Andrew, Simon, Phillip, Nathaniel, and even the angels of God are named in the chapter; but everything ascends and descends upon the Son of Man, our all-glorious Christ.

That is as it should be and must be, because God has ordained that in all things he must have the preeminence. Prophets, Apostles, all men, and all angels must decrease and be decreased before him, and he must increase and be increased by us (John 3:30). Nothing and no one shines in the light of the Sun of Righteousness except the Sun himself. — Christ stands alone as the Word of God, as Life, as the Light of men, and as the Infinite Fountain of all grace. Oh, that we might so see the Lord Jesus Christ in his glorious majesty and greatness as our Savior, that, like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, we may see “*no man, save Jesus only!*” — Make much of Christ and little of everything else.

His Fulness

God the Holy Spirit teaches two things in verse 16 that are indescribably precious to those who, by the grace of God, have experienced them. First, he tells us that all fulness is treasured up in this glorious person, our Lord Jesus Christ. Second, he tells us that all the fulness treasured up in Christ is an inexhaustible supply of grace from which all God’s elect receive all grace.

First, think about the fulness that is treasured up in the Lord Jesus. — “*His fulness.*” Here is a fulness which cannot be measured. John is talking about “*the fulness of him that filleth all in all!*” It is an infinite fulness (Colossians 1:18-19; 2:9-10). The fulness from which we receive all grace is in Christ, in him alone, in him and nowhere else! — There is no fulness to be found in any man, in any church, in any religious ritual, ceremony, or ordinance, or in any experience!

Paul tells us “*it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.*” “*His fulness*” is “*all fulness.*” All fulness is in him, infinite, incomprehensible, Divine, saving fulness, all of it is

in Immanuel. God has placed all fulness in his Son. Where else could he put it? All fulness is in Christ radically. It cannot be had anywhere else. It is not in his doctrine, but in him. It is not in his Word, but in him. It is not in his blood, but in him. It is not in his righteousness, but in him. It is the Person of Christ that gives worth, weight, merit, and efficacy to his Word, his offices, and his work, not the other way around. Would you get grace? Would you get salvation? You must get Christ. You must receive it from “*his fulness.*” Christ alone is great enough to contain all fulness, immutable to retain all fulness, and suitable to distribute all fulness.

I repeat, “*His fulness*” is “*all fulness!*” What a superlative wealth of meaning there is in that statement! What a word of comfort this is for us poor, bankrupt sinners! By nature, we are all emptiness and vanity; but “*all fulness*” is in Christ. In us there is an utter lack of merit before God, a total absence of power to gain merit with God, and a complete absence of will to obey God, even if we had the ability to do so. But in Christ there is “*all fulness!*”

O my heart, Rejoice in this! O my soul, Dance before the Ark of God! Everywhere else in this vast universe there is nothing but barrenness and emptiness. — “*Vanity of vanity all is vanity!*” But, blessed be our God forever, he has provided all fulness in Christ. In us there is all emptiness and utter vanity. — “*In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.*” But in Christ there is “*all fulness.*”

As I said before, in us there is a lack of all merit, an absence of all power to procure any, and even an absence of will to procure it if we could. Our nature is a desert, empty and void and waste, inhabited only by sin, darkness, and death. We are all emptiness; but in Christ dwells all fulness. Are you dead? Christ is Life! — Are you sin? Christ is Righteousness. — Are you naked? Christ is Clothing. — Are you hungry? Christ is Bread. — Are you thirsty? Christ is Water. — Are you dirty? Christ is Cleansing. — Are you blind? Christ is Light. — Are you weary? Christ is Rest. — Are you a debtor? Christ is Ransom. — Are you helpless? Christ is Strength. — Are you guilty? Christ is Pardon. — Are you a prisoner? Christ is Liberty. — Are you condemned? Christ is Deliverance. — Are you emptiness? Christ is Fulness.

Christ is substance, not the shadow of fulness. — Fulness, not the foretaste of fulness. — The reality, not the picture of fulness. Let me show you what I mean. — The Old Testament types are instructive, but not saving. The ordinances and ceremonies of the law pointed us to One who would put away sin; but they could never do so. Those sacrifices were beautiful, costly, and impressive; but they could never satisfy the justice of God, silence a guilty conscience, or put away a single sin.

Christ is all the fulness of all the Old Testament types and pictures (Hebrews 10:1-14).

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away one stain;
But Christ the Lamb of God takes all our sin away,
A Sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they!

If those rituals and sacrifices ordained by God could never put away sin, what you do certainly can't! Christ is all fulness!

Christ is all the fulness of the law (Romans 10:1-13). Christ is all the fulness of all God's eternal purposes (Romans 8:28-31). And there is in the Lord Jesus Christ all the fulness of the Triune Godhead (Colossians 2:9-10). Jesus Christ the Man is the eternal God, possessing all the attributes of divinity. Obviously, his manhood is neither eternal, omnipotent, nor omnipresent. Yet, his manhood is so united with his Godhead that that Man who sits in glory is himself God. He is "*the mighty God!*"

Still there is more. — All the fulness of the infinite, triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, resides in the body of that Man who died at Calvary and now reigns over all things. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is all of God we now know, and all of God we shall ever know. Jesus Christ is all there is of God! We are Trinitarians (1 John 5:7). However, all fulness of the triune God resides in and is known by Jesus Christ alone, in whom all fulness dwells.

Yet, there is more still. All the fulness of grace is in Christ. This "*all fulness*" is in Christ mediatorially. It is in Christ for us. "*His fulness*" is the fulness of the one Mediator between God and men. As the result of our Lord's mediatorial work as our Surety, Substitute, and Representative before God, as the result of all that he has done in bringing in everlasting righteousness, in putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and in the redemption he accomplished at Calvary, all fulness dwells in him. — All fulness for us toward God. — And all fulness for us from God!

All fulness for us toward God dwells in Christ. That is to say, all that God almighty requires of us dwells in Christ, perfectly and perpetually (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). And all fulness for us from God dwells in Christ. — "*Of his fulness have we received, and grace for grace!*" Everything we need, everything our souls require is in Christ, our all-glorious, all-sufficient Savior. With confident joy we sing...

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in Thee I find!

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:3-7)

What do you want? What does your soul need? It is in Christ. All fulness dwells in Christ. Go to Christ for your soul's need. Do you need a new heart? Do you want a broken heart? Do you want faith? Do you want repentance toward God? Do you want life eternal? Do you want

certain preservation? Does your soul crave cleansing? Does your heart need consolation? Do you crave the blessed assurance of grace and salvation? Go to Christ for your soul's need. It is in him. All fulness is in our Savior.

What mortal tongue can express this infinite bounty? All fulness is in Christ. And this Christ is ours. — *“The Lord is the Portion of your inheritance and your cup!”* Try to get hold of this. — If you are in Christ *“his fulness”* is yours! — Infinitely yours! — Eternally yours! — Presently yours! — What can you lack? (1 Corinthians 3:21-23)

“His fulness” is the fulness of grace. It was a fulness of grace in him that made him enter into the eternal covenant and undertake suretyship engagements for us. It was a fulness of love and grace which sustained him in the discharge of his liabilities as our great Surety. It is the fulness of grace that yet constrains him to persevere in his work, saying, *“For Zion's sake I will not rest, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not hold my peace.”*

In Christ there is a fulness of grace to bestow upon needy sinners: a fulness of pardoning grace, so that no sin can ever exceed his power to forgive; a fulness of justifying grace, so that he *“justifieth the ungodly;”* a fulness of converting grace, so that he calls to himself whom he will; a fulness of quickening grace, for *“he quickeneth whom he will;”* a fulness of purifying grace, for his blood *“cleanseth us from all sin;”* a fulness of comforting grace, for he will never leave you comfortless; a fulness of sustaining grace, for *“he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep;”* a fulness of satisfying grace, for with Christ as our Shepherd we shall not want; a fulness of restoring grace, for *“he restoreth my soul;”* a fulness of sufficient grace, for he has said, *“my grace is sufficient for thee!”*

The Lord Jesus Christ is never limited in any gift or grace, but always full. Drink of *“his fulness.”* Dive into this vast ocean of *“his fulness,”* and you will know far more than any man can ever teach you.

Infinite Fulness

“His fulness” is infinite fulness, an inexhaustible barrel of fulness. — *“And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”* Mark those words *“all we.”* — *“All we,”* John says, *“have received grace for grace.”* Yet, he calls it *“fulness;”* and, as we see in Colossians 1:19, the Spirit of God calls it *“all fulness.”* It was a fulness before the first sinner came to it to receive pardon — before the first sinner drank of that river, the streams whereof make glad the City of God; and now, after myriads of blood-bought sinners have drunk of this life-giving stream, it is just as full as ever. Christ is still an infinite ocean of fulness! — This *“barrel of meal shall not waste!”*

Fulness Received

God's saints have all *“received”* of *“his fulness”* *“grace for grace,”* heaps upon heaps of grace. The word *“received”* is the same word as is used in verse 12. It is not a passive verb, but a verb of action. It refers to the act of faith, believing in Christ. All God's elect who have believed on the Lord Jesus have received and are receiving of *“his fulness”* heaps upon heaps of grace. If you would have grace, you must receive it of *“his fulness,”* too.

But you will never receive of “*his fulness*” until he has filled you with emptiness (Psalms 107:9; Proverbs 27:7; Matthew 5:6). May the Lord God graciously empty you, that you may be filled. And if you are empty, it is because Christ has come to fill your hungry soul with the fulness of his grace; and you shall receive “*of his fulness*” heaps upon heaps of grace!

If you have received of “his fulness” heaps upon heaps of grace, you shall yet receive more of the same until grace brings you to glory. — “*Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*” — This “*barrel of meal shall not waste!*”

Chapter 8

Three Questions that Identify a True Prophet

“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And 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? He said, I [am] the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. 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 answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. 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 1:19-29)

No one can question the fact that John the Baptist was a true prophet. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, declared that he was the greatest prophet to be born of a woman. That is some commendation! He was the first Baptist to walk upon the earth, the very first Baptist preacher in the world. He was the first immerser of men in the name of Christ. That is what his title, “*the Baptist*,” means, the Immerser. Both Isaiah and Malachi foretold his coming and described the ministry he would have. — He was sent in the spirit and with the power of Elijah, “*to prepare the way of the Lord*.” He was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was still in his mother’s womb. And when he was born, God sent an angel to speak of his birth.

Here, God the Holy Spirit holds this great prophet, John the Baptist, before us. He tells us that John was specifically asked three questions. John’s answers to those questions identify him as a true prophet and identify every preacher who follows as either true or false.

1. “*Who art thou?*” (v. 19)
2. “*What sayest thou of thyself?*” (v. 22)
3. “*Why baptizest thou?*” (v. 25)

“Who art thou?”

Just as Isaiah had prophesied, John appeared in the wilderness, preaching Christ, calling sinners to repentance, because the Messiah, the Christ had come, and the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Multitudes heard him and were moved to repentance by the Spirit of God, and being converted by the grace of God, John baptized them in the Jordan River. All of this caused no small stir among the people and no small disturbance among the religious elite in Jerusalem. So the priests and Levites were sent out from Jerusalem to ask John 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? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No” (vv. 19-21).

The Messiah’s forerunner stood before them, one who was clearly identified as the forerunner of the Christ. That fact was obvious to everyone, everyone except the spiritually ignorant leaders of the people, the priests and Levites!

When these men asked John, “*Who art thou?*” before they could utter another word, John cut them off and said, “*I am not the Christ!*” Because the people honored him, their religious leaders were ready to elevate John highly. — Self-serving preachers will do anything to promote themselves, even promote one whose message they despise, if in doing so, they can promote and advance themselves.

Remember, these men were the great Sanhedrim, the spiritual rulers of the Jews. They were the most influential, the most revered, and the most highly educated big wheels in the Jewish church. But they did not have a clue what was going on in the kingdom of God.

They professed to be waiting for the appearance of the Messiah. They took great pride in being the descendants of Abraham, and in their knowledge of the Scriptures. They lived by the Law of Moses, and rested in their imagined obedience to it. They professed to know God’s will and believe his promises. They were confident that they understood the prophets. They were confident leaders of the people. Yet, they were totally ignorant of all things spiritual. They stand before us as sad, glaring examples of the fact that unregenerate souls, no matter how well taught, no matter how well learned, no matter how devotedly religious, are utterly without knowledge spiritually. Spiritual knowledge comes only by divine revelation (Proverbs 2:6), only by the teaching of God the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Here is the proof of Paul’s doctrine in 1 Corinthians 2. — The Christ of God, the Messiah, was standing in their midst, as John declares in verse 26; yet they did not recognize him. They saw him, but never saw him. They knew much about him, but did not know him. They lived in his company, but knew him not!

And that which was true of these men is true of men today. It may be that some who read these lines are exactly as they were. The Lord Jesus Christ is set forth crucified among you, but you do not see him, hear his voice, or know him. Another person reading the same words does see him, does hear his voice, and does know him; but you do not? Why? You are not yet born of God. May God the Holy Spirit have mercy upon you and reveal the Lord Jesus to you, visiting you with grace, effectual, free, saving grace in Christ (Luke 19:44; Job 10:12; Isaiah 12:1-6; 25:9)

When these men asked John, “*Who art thou?*” before they could utter another word, John cut them off and said, “*I am not the Christ!*” They were willing to receive him as a reincarnation of Elijah, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, or even as the Messiah (that Prophet of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, if he would simply accept their praise and be

identified with them. But John was a true prophet. He refused their honor and refused to take any honor to himself. Instead, he immediately turned attention away from himself to Christ. Nineteen times, he used a double affirmation to turn attention away from himself, to make certain that he was not misunderstood.

Like John the Baptist, God's servants will not align themselves with God's enemies. They cannot be bribed with money, power, or recognition. And they do not seek the praise, or even the approval of men. God's servants desire no honor, but the honor of Christ. They studiously turn the light away from themselves to him.

“What sayest thou of thyself?”

Look at the next question. When they could get no satisfaction, they pressed on. — *“Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?”* (v. 22) John might have answered, “I am the son of Zachariah the priest. I am filled with the Spirit from my mother's womb. I am a remarkable man raised up by God and sent to prepare the way before the Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah, as Malachi prophesied.” But instead *“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias”* (v. 23).

Those men who are sent of God seek no glory or acclaim for themselves. They look upon themselves, at best, as nothing but unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). When John referred to himself as *“the voice,”* he used the very term the Holy Spirit used of him 700 years earlier in Isaiah 40:3. John's mission was to bear witness of Christ, not himself. A voice is heard and not seen. The Lord Jesus endures long after *“the voice”* is silent.

“The voice” cried in the wilderness, not in the temple or in the streets of Jerusalem. Why? Because the Lord was no longer in the temple. Judaism was nothing but an empty shell. The Jews were a nation of religious legalists, steeped in self-righteous formalism, ceremonies, and rituals. There was no place for John in the religion of his day; and he did not want a place in it.

He was a true prophet. He had nothing to say for himself, or about himself. He refused to promote himself, or even to defend himself. He had no cause, but Christ. He knew why God had raised him up and sent him, and he would not be turned aside from it (Isaiah 40:1-11).

John knew exactly who he was dealing with. He was dealing with *“they which were sent were of the Pharisees”* (v. 24). They were thoroughly orthodox heretics, self-serving religious politicians, pretentious hypocrites, cruel and persecuting self-righteous legalists, blind leaders of blind people!

“Why baptizest thou?”

These proud Pharisees kept pressing. Because God's faithful servant, this true prophet, refused to accept their honor, and refused to take any honor to himself, because he made no pretentious claim of earthly religious authority, they challenged his right to perform any religious ordinance, let alone a new ordinance. He had not been to seminary. He had not been ordained by any earthly

religious body. He had not come up through their ranks. John did not fit any mold. He could not be put in any religious box. He was not a Liberal Sadducee, or a Reformed Pharisee, or a Heretical Herodian. So these good preservers of the religious status quo said, "*Why baptizest thou if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*" (v. 25)

That's a question every preacher ought to be required to answer. You can determine whether he is God's servant, or the servant of man, by his answer. I have baptized many; but why? The question is "Why?" not "How?" There can be no question about how baptism is performed. Baptism is immersion. Anything else (sprinkling, pouring, etc.) is not baptism. — "*Why baptizest thou?*" — "*John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not*" (v. 26).

The word "*with*" in our King James version is a very, very poor translation. The Greek word "en" is a preposition indicating position. John did not say, "I baptize with water." He said, "I baptize in water." There is a huge difference. Before I show you the answers given in the New Testament to this third question, "*Why baptizest thou?*" let's look at verses 26-28. Again, John focuses our attention, not on the ordinance, but upon the Savior, because the ordinance is meaningless apart from the Savior. "*Christ is all,*" not baptism, not the church, not you, and not me. In all things, he must have the preeminence!

"John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing" (vv. 26-28).

John stood his ground; but he wanted all to know his true mission, which was to point sinners to Christ. These men were raising questions about church authority and baptism, just as multitudes do today, while they were utter strangers to Christ himself. Multitudes debate and argue about side issues and leave that which is vital undecided. — "*What think ye of Christ?*" That is the matter that is vital (1 Corinthians 1:17.)

"*There standeth one among you, whom ye know not*" (John 1:10-11). Standing in their midst was the Seed of woman, Abraham's Seed, David's Son, the fulfillment of all promises, prophecies, and pictures of the Messiah given by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures; yet, they knew him not.

Then the Baptist said, "*He it is, who is coming after me* (coming to be revealed after me) *is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose!*" John could not find words strong enough to express his insignificance or his Savior's majesty, supremacy, and glory. In verse 20 he says, "Christ is preferred before me because *he was before me!*" He came to this earth at God's appointed time, but he is the eternal God and the eternal Savior (John 8:58; Proverbs 8:24-30).

But why did John baptize people? Why do we baptize people? The Word of God gives three very specific answers to that question.

1. By baptism we show, in this symbolic ordinance, how all righteousness was fulfilled for us by the obedience of Christ, our Substitute, unto death (Matthew 3:15).
2. In believer's baptism the child of God shows, by vivid symbolism, how his sins were washed away by the sin-atonement death of Christ, that we might receive the Spirit of life (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:13-14).
3. By baptism the believer publicly identifies himself with Christ, his people, and his gospel, and publicly avows his commitment to his Lord (Romans 6:1-7).

Christ the Lamb

Like the first Baptist, this preacher would have you see and know, worship and adore, trust and rejoice in Christ alone, the Lamb of God. — *“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (v. 29).

May God the Holy Spirit enable you to now behold and never cease to behold the Lamb of God. In this magnificent sentence John tells us four things about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

1. He is the only Object of all true faith — *“Behold the Lamb!”* God our Savior says, — *“Look unto me and be ye saved”* (Isaiah 45:22).
2. Christ was ordained, given, and sent by God. He is *“the Lamb of God.”*
3. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one Sacrifice for sin. — *“The Lamb!”* — God has provided *“himself a lamb for a burnt offering”* (Genesis 22:8).
4. This blessed Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only Remover of sin. — *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”*

Chapter 9

“Behold the Lamb of God!”

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 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. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. 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! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.” (John 1:29-37)

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, is the Lamb of God, who “*taketh away the sin of the world.*” In the passage before us John has been preaching the gospel in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, and baptizing those who believed. Then, in verse 29 we read. — “*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*”

Christ the Lamb

The Lord Jesus Christ is “*the Lamb.*” He is the only sin-atoning sacrifice, the only lamb by whose death atonement could be made, the only lamb by whose blood we have access unto the Father, the only lamb whose blood being sprinkled upon the mercy-seat has obtained eternal redemption for us. Christ is not a lamb, but *the Lamb*. He is not a way, but *the Way*. He is not a door, but *the Door*. He is not a savior, but *the Savior*. — “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

Christ is “*the Lamb of God.*” He is the Lamb who is of God, who came from God, and who is God. He could not be our Savior if he is not our God. Only one who is God could offer infinite satisfaction for the sins of his people. This Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, “*taketh away the sin of the world.*” He is the only sacrifice for sin. It is he and he alone who “*taketh away*” sin by the sacrifice of himself. It is the blood of this Lamb, God’s dear Son, that “*cleanseth us from all sin.*” He is an effectual sacrifice for sin. He does not try to take away sin. He does not offer to take away sin. He does not merely make it possible for sin to be taken away. He “*taketh away sin!*” The Lamb of God is a sacrifice of perpetual efficacy.

John 1:29 does not say, “He took away sin,” though that is true. By his one sacrifice he put away sin. John the Baptist said, “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*” Oh, how I love those words, “*taketh away!*” Quite literally, John was saying, “Behold the Lamb of God that continually bears away the sin of the world.” Christ is the sin-bearer; and he continually bears away our sin. Notice the word “*sin*” is singular, not “sins,” plural. The Lord Jesus Christ continually bears away both our sins and the curse that sin brings.

This is our Savior’s continual work. Though our salvation was finished in all its details from eternity, though our redemption was fully accomplished at Calvary, the Lord God continually performs it in us and continually assures us that he is doing so by using present tense verbs as simple statements of fact, declaring the reality of every believer’s experience of grace. What he did in eternity and what he did at Calvary are things utterly insignificant to me until he performs them in me. — He “*redeemeth thy life*

from destruction” (Psalm 103:4). — He “*is near that justifieth me*” (Isaiah 50:8). — He “*justifieth the ungodly*” (Romans 4:5). — “*It is God that justifieth*” (Romans 8:33). — It is Christ the Lamb “*who forgiveth all thine iniquities*” (Psalm 103:3), who “*cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7), and “*taketh away the sin of the world.*” — What sweet terms of grace these are to our souls!

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is the universally effectual sacrifice for sin. He “*taketh away the sin of the world.*” Obviously, John does not intend for us to understand that Christ bears away the sin of all who are in the world. We know that is not the case, because there are many who bear the curse of God upon themselves forever in hell, multitudes whose sins shall never be taken away. But Christ is the only sin-bearer there is in all the world; and he takes away sin, all manner of sin from all manner of men, throughout the world.

The Message of the Book

“*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!*” — Behold him in the Book of God. I want you to see and see clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God is the subject of Holy Scripture. The theme of the Bible is redemption, atonement, access to, and acceptance with God by a sacrificial Lamb; and that Lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is referred to as the Lamb of God in the Book of Revelation alone twenty-seven times. This blessed Book is all about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (Luke 24:27, 44-47).

He is the great antitype of all the Old Testament types. He is the One of whom they all speak. He is the One who fulfills them all. As we read through and study the Old Testament, we see the Lord Jesus Christ set forth not only in promise and prophecy, but also in the types and shadows of the Mosaic economy. All of those Old Testament types and pictures speak of Christ as our great and glorious Savior. The Lord God instituted the whole legal system of the Old Testament to show us the gospel of his grace in Christ. But the most outstanding, the most significant of the instituted types of the Old Testament was the paschal lamb sacrificed every year on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 12; Leviticus 16; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

Nothing more beautifully, more clearly, or more accurately represented the glorious person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament than the lamb sacrificed, slain, and offered to God on the Day of Atonement. Everyone even slightly familiar with the Old Testament knew that when Messiah came he would appear as the Lamb of God. Therefore, when John saw him, he cried, “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” And everyone who heard him knew exactly what he was saying: “Behold the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God has come to redeem and save his people from their sins!”

The Scriptures universally declare that Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, is the Lamb of God. We have been redeemed from our sins by the gory, but glorious, bloody, but beautiful sacrifice of the Son of God as a Lamb slaughtered in our place (Isaiah 53:7-8; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

The Son of God was foreordained and slain for us as the Lamb of God before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). And he was manifested and revealed in the fulness of time to put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26). Throughout the Scriptures we see Christ set before us under the figure of the sacrificial Lamb of God.

1. **In Genesis 3 and 4 he is the Lamb typified.** Abel brought the blood of a lamb to make atonement for his sins and to worship God, because his father Adam told him how the Lord God slew a lamb for him and his wife Eve in the Garden and clothed them with its skins. This shows us the way of grace and redemption through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7).

2. **In Genesis 22 we see our Lord Jesus presented as the Lamb prophesied.** Isaac knew that in order to come to God and worship him a lamb had to be slain. So he asked his father, “*Where is the Lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*” (vv. 7-8). And so he did. God provided for himself that day a lamb to be sacrificed in Isaac’s place. But he provided himself as the Lamb to be sacrificed in our place in the person of his dear Son (2 Corinthians 5:21).

3. **In Isaiah 53 we see Christ set forth as the Lamb personified.** Isaiah told us that the Lamb of God was to be a man, a real man like us, the Servant of the Lord, identified with us, assuming our flesh (Hebrews 2:14-17), assuming our sin (Isaiah 53:6), and dying in our place (1 Peter 3:18).

4. **In John 1:29 John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God,” and the Lamb is identified.** John knew all about those sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament. His father was a priest. When Christ came, he was identified by God’s messenger. He said, “There he is boys. That is the One I have been telling you about. That man is the Lamb of God that has come to put away sin!”

5. **In John 19 we see the Lord of glory as the Lamb crucified** (vv. 17-19, 28-30). Whenever you look upon the crucifixion of Christ, ever remember that his death was no accident. The Lamb of God died by the hand of God, according to the purpose of God, at the time appointed by God, and effectually redeemed all the people of God, by satisfying the justice of God (Galatians 3:13; 4:4).

6. **In the Book of Revelation the Apostle John saw the Lord Jesus Christ sitting upon the throne as the Lamb glorified.** In heaven’s glory Jesus Christ is worshipped in his sacrificial character as the Lamb of God who has effectually redeemed his people out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue, by his blood. The Lamb’s everlasting glory is the result of his accomplishments in his death as our Substitute (Isaiah 53:10-12; Revelation 5:6-14; 7:9-17; 14:1; 15:3; 21:22-23; 22:1-3).

The Preacher’s Message

If the Lamb of God is the singular message of this Book, let him be the singular message of every pulpit. Would to God these words were sounded out and proclaimed from every pulpit in the world incessantly! I say this without reservation. — The Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God is the gospel preacher’s message.

I did not say that Christ as the Lamb of God ought to be the gospel preacher’s message. I said that if a man is God’s servant, if he is God’s messenger, if he is a man sent of God, if a man is a gospel preacher, Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God is his message. John the Baptist was the first Gospel preacher in this dispensation. He is the example to all who follow him. His message was “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” The Apostle Peter was the chief spokesman to the early church and to the Jewish world. His message was the same. Even the deacons who preached preached the Lamb of God. The Apostle Paul was the first gospel preacher to the Gentiles. His message was the same. In fact, as you read the Book of Acts, you find the whole church going about everywhere talking to sinners about the Lamb of God. They went everywhere preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified as the Lamb of God. Though few these days have any understanding of this fact, I want you to understand that God’s servants and God’s people still go everywhere talking about the Lamb of God. Look at the example of John the Baptist and learn something about what a gospel preacher is.

A gospel preacher is a man with one purpose, one business, one object in life. — His only business is to cry, “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” John was born and sent out into the world for this purpose. Indeed, every man called and sent of God into the world has been born for that work and is sent forth of God to proclaim Jesus Christ as the sin-atonement Lamb of God. We are sent to bear witness of him. Those

who turn aside to other things and do not incessantly declare Christ as the Lamb of God to eternity bound sinners make a mockery of the ministry and of the poor souls who hear them. Like John, we must denounce the religions of the age, denounce the sins of men, and call sinners to repentance; but our message is and always must be, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*"

That preacher who fails to point sinners to Christ as the Lamb of God is a traitor to the souls of his hearers. He will in the last day have his portion with the damned (Ezekiel 33:8; 1 Corinthians 9:16).

I cannot imagine a doom more terrible than that which awaits the man who claims to be God's servant but does not faithfully preach the gospel to his hearers. Sermons that do not point sinners to Christ, sermons that are not full of Christ, sermons that leave men looking to anyone other than Christ will be hard to answer for in the Day of Judgment. It is cruel beyond description for a preacher to amuse eternity bound sinners with the trifles of religious speculation, theological niceties, denominational dogma, and prophetic mysteries. Playing with men's souls is murderous work! And if the Lamb of God is not preached, the man who pretends to be preaching is doing nothing but playing with men's souls! Sermons without Christ are damning to those who preach them and damning to those who hear them! If I am God's servant, I will, I must, God helping me, I shall, like John, have nothing to do when I open my mouth to preach except to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, saying, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*"

John also shows us by example that gospel preachers are men whose eyes are fixed on Christ the Lamb of God. Read verses 35-36. — "*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!*" The preacher's eye must be upon Christ if he is going to point sinners to Christ. They preach him best who see him best. And they see him best whose eyes are fixed upon him. John seems to have had no eye for anyone but Christ. He looked upon him adoringly, as one astonished by him, lovingly, as one ravished by him, and constantly, as one who had no interest but him. Therefore, when he spoke of the Lamb, his words had meaning and power.

Notice this too: John looked to the Lord Jesus when he seemed to be passing him by (v. 36) as well as when he was manifestly coming to him (v. 29). And his message was the same in both cases.

You will notice, if you read the chapter carefully, that John's message did not change. When he preached to a crowd of unbelievers and when he was quietly instructing just two of his disciples, he preached the same message (cf. vv. 29 & 36). He kept to one point. Like Paul, he knew nothing among his hearers save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I know that I am looked upon as a simpleton by some. But I know what God has sent me to do. Most preachers know too much. They need to learn to be know-nothings, knowing nothing except Jesus Christ crucified. No subject is more needful to sinners, more sweet to the saints, more hopeful to the guilty, more sanctifying to the righteous, more convicting to the fallen, more refreshing to the ransomed, or more inspiring to both saints and sinners than this: — "*Behold the Lamb of God!*" I fully agree with C. H. Spurgeon, who declared...

"To harp upon the name of Jesus is the blessed monotony of a true ministry, a monotony more full of variety than all other subjects besides. When Jesus is the first, the midst, and the last, yea, all in all, then do we make full proof of our ministry."

The Gospel's Revelation

The Lord Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, is the gospel's revelation. This is what the gospel reveals, proclaims, and teaches. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. All those typical lambs were only types. They did nothing. They accomplished nothing. They did not put away sin. They did not appease God's wrath.

They did not satisfy his justice. And they did not purge the conscience of guilt. They only pointed to Christ the Lamb of God who put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 10:1-10).

This must be understood. — Sin could never be put away without satisfaction. God almighty in his infinite wisdom found a way for us to escape his wrath; but that way does not violate his justice. The Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God has born every stroke of justice that God's elect should have born. And he alone could do it, because Christ alone is the Lamb that God appointed (Hebrews 10:5-7). Christ alone is the Lamb that God provided (1 John 4:9-10). Christ alone is the Lamb that God himself sacrificed and offered (Isaiah 53:10). Christ alone is the Lamb that God accepted (Hebrews. 1:1-3; 9:12; 10:11-14; Ephesians 5:1). And Christ alone is the Lamb that God has set forth in his covenant, before the world began, in the types, shadows, and prophecies of the law, and in the gospel (Romans 3:24-26).

Chapter 10

“Behold the Lamb of God” — Again

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 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. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. 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 1:29-36)

Is the Bible a sealed book to you? Do you have great difficulty understanding its doctrine, its precepts, and its ordinances? Many people do. To them it is like a treasure chest with a lock on it. They know that it contains many rich gems. But they have no key to open it.

The Key

There is one key which will open the Book to you and reveal its golden treasures. That key is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Foundation, the Center, and the Mainspring of all Divine Truth. This is what he said, “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*” If we would avoid error in interpreting and applying the Scriptures, we must understand that everything in the Bible speaks of and relates to Christ. Divorce any doctrine from Christ and that doctrine becomes heresy. Divorce any precept from Christ and that precept becomes self-righteous legality.

For example: I have heard men preach on the doctrine of the church as though the church were nothing more than a physical religious organization begun by our Lord during his earthly ministry. But the church is much more. It is the body of Christ. It is a spiritual building made up of men and women redeemed by Christ and vitally joined to him by faith. Christ is the Foundation upon which the church is built, the Head by which the church is governed, and the Bread upon which the church lives.

I have heard men talk about the kingdom of Christ as though it were nothing more than a continuance, or re-establishment, of the physical kingdom of David. Again, the Kingdom of Christ is spiritual. Our Lord entered his kingdom by the door of the cross. And he builds his kingdom upon the cross. Christ sits upon the throne today as a direct result of his finished work at Calvary. Whether we are talking about the kingdom in its present or its future manifestations, being a part of this kingdom is nothing more or less than surrendering to the claims of Christ as Lord and King.

I have even heard men preach on election as though it were nothing more than a logical part of a theological system. Election is a precious truth of Divine Revelation when it is understood properly. Our election is in Christ. God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of Christ. Election is nothing more or less than God loving a people before all worlds, putting them in Christ, and determining to make them like Christ. Election is God choosing to save us rather than damn us, as we justly deserve, for Christ's sake.

As for the precepts of Scripture, these, too, are centered in Christ; and obedience to them is motivated by him. Those things that we call "practical godliness" ought to be preached. But they must be motivated by gospel principles. The Christian life is not an extension of the Mosaic law, or merely a system of morality. It is obedience to Christ. It is following his example. Wives are to be submissive to their husbands, as the church is submissive to Christ. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Servants (employees) are to serve their masters (employers) "*as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*" Believing businessmen are to treat their employees with kindness and generosity, knowing that Christ their Master is in heaven, treating them with kindness and generosity. Believers are to forgive offences against them, even as God for Christ's sake forgives us. We are to love one another, as Christ loved us. We are to give with a willing heart, generously, even as Christ willingly gave all for us and to us. This kind of service to Christ is free, spontaneous, unconstrained, and motivated by a loving heart. It arises from the knowledge of the gospel.

I know that these are only a few of the doctrines and precepts of the Bible. But they will suffice to illustrate my point. Christ is the key to sacred Scriptures. Every doctrine of the Bible must be understood and taught in the light of the gospel. Every precept of godliness must be motivated by gospel principles. We truly preach the whole counsel of God only when we preach it in the light of Christ and him crucified.

The key that opens the treasure chest of Holy Scripture is Christ crucified. If we are to understand the Book of God, we must "*Behold the Lamb of God*" in it. This is the message of Holy Scripture, the message for which the first Baptist is famous, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*" I want to do what I can to make everyone who hears my voice, reads what I write, or is in any way influenced by me to see that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God is...

- The Subject of Holy Scripture. — The Bible is a "Him Book." It's all about him.
- The Preacher's Only Message (1 Corinthians 2:2; 9:16).
- The Gospel's Glorious Revelation. (vv. 31-34; 2 Corinthians 5:16).
- The Sinner's only Hope (1 Timothy 1:1).
- The Believer's only Rule (John 13:15)"
- The Worshipper's only Object (Revelation 4 and 5).
- The Embodiment and Glory of the Triune God (vv. 14, 16; Colossians 2:9).

John's Message

You will notice in the passage before us that this was John's message on two consecutive days. On the first day, John was preaching to a large crowd in the open air in Bethabara beyond Jordan. It was a mixed multitude. Many were believers he had just baptized, young converts at

best, many were lost religionists, Pharisees and their disciples, and many more were on their way to hell and were just curious about this strange man who was regarded by all to be a prophet, though he was rough as a cob and anything but a stereotypical preacher. On the next day, John was privately instructing two of his disciples. Yet, on both days his message was exactly the same — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

Behold him as the Lamb slain from eternity (Revelation 13:8), vicariously sacrificed at Calvary (Romans 5:8-10), enthroned in glory to save his people (John 17:2), interceding in heaven for God’s elect (1 John 2:1-2), and coming again to judge the quick and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5; Revelation 6:12-17).

In the previous chapter I labored the point that this is the universal message of Holy Scripture and the singular message of true gospel preachers. In this chapter I want us to behold the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God again; and I want to make some very practical observations about this message. Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God sacrificed, slain, risen from the dead, and exalted in all his saving efficacy and fulness is the message God has given us to proclaim. Let me give you five reasons why I preach this message exclusively.

Perfect Balance

First, Christ as the Lamb of God is the perfectly balanced message of the gospel. Every time a man wants to excuse himself for not preaching the gospel, or wants to justify his criticisms of those who do, this is the line that is used — “I believe we ought to have a balanced message.” Yet, those who use that line seem to me to always have a lopsided message of works.

Christ as the Lamb of God is the perfectly balanced message of the gospel. When Christ crucified is a preacher’s message, when Christ is all in all in preaching, you have everything in that message. Christ crucified is a message of doctrinal instruction, experimental grace, and practical godliness.

All vital doctrinal instruction is contained in this message. — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” That preacher who preaches Christ crucified clearly and constantly gives his people the best possible doctrinal instruction, for he proclaims...

- The Eternal Deity of Christ. — “*He was before me.*”
- The Incarnation of Christ. — “*This is the Son of God.*”
- The Strict Justice of God. — “*The soul that sinneth it shall die.*”
- The Gigantic Evil of Sin. — The Lamb of God was the sacrifice required to put it away.
- The Utter Inability of Man. — There is no need for this Lamb if a sinner can save himself!
- The Glorious Efficacy of Christ’s Atonement. — He “*taketh away sin!*”
- The Superabundance of God’s Grace (Romans 5:20-21).
- The Infinite Love of God (Romans 5:6-8).
- The Infallible Security of God’s Elect. — How can they perish for whom such a sacrifice was made?

If you want a personal, experimental religion, as I do, if you need experimental grace, grace that is felt in the depths of your soul, this is the message that will promote it. — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

- Are you vexed with sin? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Are you troubled with affliction? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Are you in need of comfort? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you need reviving? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Are you fearful about your soul? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Are you concerned about the future? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- If you need instruction in what men call “practical godliness”, you need to hear this message. — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” What can be more practical, what can so effectually promote good works, what can be more inspiring to godliness than Christ crucified? Read Titus 2:1-14 and 3:4-8.
- Do you want to learn how to give? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- Do you want to know what kind of father and husband you ought to be? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you want to know how to serve God’s church and kingdom? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you want to know how to love your brother? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you want to know how to bear affliction? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you want to know how to pray? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” Read Matthew 6:9-13.
- Do you want to know how to live? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”
- Do you want to know how to die? — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

Our Constant Need

Second, Christ must be constantly preached, because we need to always have him before our eyes. Christ Jesus as the sin-atonement Lamb of God ought to be the constant and dominant object of every believer’s heart. I know that we live in this world and must, of necessity, give thought and consideration to many things. But the one topic which ought to captivate our hearts and minds is the Lord Jesus Christ, our dear Redeemer (Colossians 3:1-3).

Allow me to paraphrase Psalms 1:1-3 to show you my meaning. — “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in Christ the LORD; and in his Savior doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”

Great, Ennobling Subject

Third, I preach Christ crucified as the Lamb of God incessantly, because Jesus Christ crucified is the greatest, most glorious, and ennobling subject of thought in all the world. I do not claim to be a scholar, or a man of great brilliance. I am neither. But I have done a little reading, and have had a little experience in many things. I have found nothing to compare with Christ crucified. He is the sum of all truth, the essence of all knowledge, the purpose of all creation, the explanation of

all providence, the soul of life, the light of light, the heaven of heaven, and the glory of glory! In a word, “*Christ is All*” (Colossians 3:10-11). C. H. Spurgeon wrote...

“What the hand is to the lute,
What the breath is to the flute,
What is fragrance to the smell,
What the spring is to the well,
What the flower is to the bee,
That is Jesus Christ to me.

What is the mother to the child,
What the guide in pathless wild,
What is oil to troubled wave,
What is ransom to the slave,
What is water to the sea?
That is Jesus Christ to me.”

No subject in the world is so vast, so sublime, so elevating as this: — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

- Talk of mysteries — Try God incarnate, slain, and glorified!
- Talk of romance — Try describing the love of God!
- Talk of beauty — Try the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!
- Talk of science — Try the science of substitution, satisfaction, and redemption!
- Talk of philosophy — Try the philosophy forgiveness.
- Talk of Law — Try justice satisfied with mercy granted at the same time!

Compared with these things, a preacher long ago said, “What are the sciences but human ignorance set forth in order? What are the classics but the choicest of Babel’s jargon compared with his teachings? What are the poets but dreamers, and philosophers but fools in his presence?” Jesus Christ alone is wisdom, beauty, eloquence and power. Compared to Christ crucified, everything else is just contemptible (1 Corinthians 1:17-31).

One Thing Needful

Fourth, I preach Christ as the Lamb of God because he is the one thing needful.

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

We may forget many things without harm. We may even forget some important things without endangering ourselves or anyone else. But we must have Christ. He is the Bread of life. Without him we cannot live. He is the Water of life. Without him we must die. Christ crucified as the Lamb of God is our faith, our doctrine, and our hope. His blood is the life-blood of true religion. Any other faith is a lifeless, false faith.

Glorifies God

Fifth, I preach Jesus Christ crucified as the Lamb of God for sinners, because this message glorifies God. This message, “*Behold the Lamb of God*,” declares our God to be both a just God and a Savior, and calls sinners to him (Isaiah 45:20-22). Salvation begins in the experience of it with beholding the Lamb (Isaiah 45:22). Salvation is maintained beholding the Lamb (Hebrews 12:1-2). And salvation is consummated and completed beholding the Lamb (1 John 3:2).

“*Behold the Lamb of God*” with reverence. Lift your eyes up to heaven and behold him now. Trust him. Worship him. Love him. “*Behold the Lamb of God*” in the blessed ordinances of the gospel every time a saved sinner is immersed in and rises from the waters of baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), and every time you sit at the Lord’s Table with God’s saints observing together in memory of him who loved us and gave himself for us (1 Corinthians 11:20-26). In our baptism we confess our faith in and union with the Lamb of God in his death, his burial, and his resurrection. In the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper we remember our Savior’s work of redemption, beholding the Lamb of God in the bread that symbolizes his holy body and in the wine that symbolizes his sin-atoning blood. — “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

Chapter 11

“I knew him not.”

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 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. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:29-34)

Most everyone I meet is assured that he knows Christ. They have been led down the Romans Road to salvation. They have been told that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died upon the cross for their sins, and that he rose from the dead the third day. Then, they were told that if they would repeat what someone called “the sinner’s prayer”, they would be saved. They did as they were told; and they are sure that they know the Christ of God.

Have I described you? Is that your experience? If so, you must be shocked every time you read the testimony of John the Baptist in this passage. Here is a man who knew the Lord Jesus intimately as a man, his first cousin, but declares twice, “*I knew him not.*” Remember, the one speaking here was John the Baptist, our Savior’s first cousin. Yet, he says, “*I knew him not.*” What are we to make of that?

We know that John the Baptist knew Christ. I repeat, he was John’s first cousin. Yet, twice he said, “*I knew him not.*” What do you suppose that means? What is the significance of that statement? That is the question I want to answer in this study. — What did John mean when he said, “*I knew him not*”?

John’s Message

In this passage the apostle John is giving us his inspired account of the ministry of John the Baptist. The Baptist’s message was the proclamation of God’s Christ. He was sent as Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord. The first thing John the apostle tells us about that great prophet is that he was “*a man sent from God.*” — “*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John*” (v. 6). The only man who can preach the gospel to us is that man who is sent of God with his message (Jeremiah 23:32; Romans 10:15).

What reason we have to bless God for his goodness in sending a man to tell us about our Savior, the Lord Jesus, proclaiming his great salvation (Isaiah 52:7). John the Baptist was sent “*to bear witness of the Light*” (v. 7). Being a prophet of God, he had only one purpose in life, one function, one work to do, and was useful for only that one thing. — He came “*to bear witness of the Light,*” to point sinners to Christ, who alone is the Light of the world. And he would not be

turned aside from that one glorious work. It consumed his life. What a witness he bore of the Light! He declared Christ as the shining Light of the world (v. 5). John the Baptist proclaimed that all the fulness of grace is in Christ alone (v. 16). Then he asserted that all grace and truth come to men only in, by, and through the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 17). In verse 18 the apostle tells us that John the Baptist openly asserted that Christ, who is alone the Revelation of the triune God, is the eternal Word with God in heaven, even when he was here upon the earth. And the first Baptist preacher to walk the earth declared Christ's pre-eminence and pre-existence as our eternal Savior (v. 30).

Now, look at verse 29. Here is John's message. — *"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 the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus walking by. When he did, he called for all who heard his voice to behold him, trust him, and follow him who is the Lamb of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"* (Revelation 13:8). Scripture is filled with pictures, prophecies, and descriptions of Christ as the Lamb of God (Exodus 12; Leviticus 9:3; Isaiah 53:7; Revelation 5:6). He is the Lamb who is God and the Lamb of God's own providing (Romans 3:25). God always gives what he requires, requires only what he gives, and always accepts what he gives.

John the Baptist declared that this Lamb, by the virtue of his sacrifice, *"taketh away the sin of the world."* That is to say, he is taking away the sin of the world perpetually, now and forever, by an eternally perpetual and effectual act. As the sun shines and the spring runs without interruption, so Christ takes away the sins of his people scattered through all the world perpetually! Let that be the perpetual picture we have of him. As we multiply sins, he multiplies pardons (Zechariah 13:1; Isaiah 55:7).

All this John the Baptist preached *"that all men through him might believe"* (v. 7). Gospel preachers are men sent of God, preaching the grace and glory of God in Christ the Redeemer, as instruments by whom others believe. — *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."* In verse 30 John again declares the supremacy and glory of Christ. All this was done and all these things were spoken, after he had baptized the Lord Jesus.

"Knew Him Not"

Then, in verse 31 he throws us this curve. — *"And I knew him not."* He repeats the same words in verse 33. — *"And I knew him not."*

"And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

This is John the Baptist's recollection of meeting Christ in the flesh. When he said, *"I knew him not,"* he was not saying I had not yet met him in person. John the Baptist was not only

God's prophet, he was the Savior's cousin. He had been brought up with him. His mother, Elizabeth, who called the Lord Jesus her Lord when she welcomed Mary into her home, had (we may be sure) often told John about him. Surely, she would have described the Savior's wondrous birth many times, as she spoke to her son, whom she knew was to be his forerunner. Elizabeth must have often reminded John of how he leaped in her womb for joy when Mary came to her with her Lord and his Lord in her womb (Luke 1:39-45).

Though we have no record of it, it is likely that John and the Lord Jesus were often together as they grew up. There is no question that John knew who the Savior was, and that he was convinced that he was the Christ of God. When the Lord Jesus came to be baptized by him, "*John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*" (Matthew 3:14).

After the Flesh

What, then, is the meaning of John's twice repeated statement to the Pharisees — "*I knew him not*"? If you will look back at verses 26 and 27, you will get a hint.

"John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

John said to the Pharisees, "I was once in the same boat you are in. Though I knew much about the Son of God by the instructions of my parents, though I was, like you, looking for the Messiah, the Christ of God, of whom the prophets spoke, though I knew I knew him after the flesh, I did not know him."

He was saying, "Until he was revealed to me by God the Holy Spirit, I had not beheld him, but now I do. I knew him not; but now I know him. He walks among you. He is the One with whom you have to do; but you know him not. You do not need to be concerned about who I am. You need to be concerned about who he is! I am nobody, just a voice, a noise in the wilderness; but he who walks among you is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Do not concern yourself with me and my baptism; concern yourself with him and his baptism."

These things are "*written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Romans 15:4). May God the Holy Spirit, who caused them to be written, use them for that end.

There is no doubt that prior to his birth implanted in his mind and heart was the message of the Messiah. I would not attempt to explain this; but John the Baptist was a prophet from his mother's womb; and he knew Christ by special revelation, even when he was in her womb, leaping for joy because of his incarnation (Luke 1:41, 44; Jeremiah 1:5).

John's knowledge of Christ was a miracle of grace, which is basically the meaning of his name, John, "God has graced, or Jehovah is gracious." Yet, when John says, "*I knew him not,*"

he was in fact saying that it had not yet been revealed to him that this man, his cousin, was the Christ; but now he had been revealed to him as the Lamb of God and the Son of God.

Christ Revealed

How was the Lord Jesus revealed and made known to John the Baptist as the Christ, the Lamb of God and the Son of God? The fact that he emphatically declares, and declares twice, "*I knew him not,*" is of paramount importance, because John uses it as the background for the explanation he gives in verses 33-34 of how he came to recognize that this man from Nazareth is the Son of God, the Messiah, the One for whom he was sent to bear witness, and to prepare the way.

"And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

John is saying, "Though I knew him not, I now know him by the Word of God, by the Spirit of God, and by the faith God has given me." He recognized Christ for who He was based on the Word of God (vv. 31-34). He once knew Christ after the flesh, but no more. Now, he knew him after the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:16).

By the Word of God

First, John knew Christ by the Word of God. God himself had described the Lord Jesus with such clarity that there could be no mistake as to Who he was once he was revealed. He said, either by an articulate voice, or by a divine impulse on his mind, or by the revelation of the Spirit, "*Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*" This is a plainly revealed fact: — Faith in Christ is conveyed to chosen, redeemed sinners by God the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (Romans 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

The Word of God, the gospel of Christ, is the power of God unto salvation, the catalyst God uses to give sinners life and faith in Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation in all who believe (Romans 1:16).

The Book of God repeatedly asserts that regeneration and faith in Christ, gifts of God the Holy Spirit and operations of his irresistible grace, are communicated to chosen, redeemed sinners through the instrumentality of gospel preaching. The Lord God plainly declares that it is his purpose and pleasure to save his elect through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 1:15-17; 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

Perhaps you think, "What if one of God's elect is in a remote barbarian tribe in the jungles of New Guinea where no gospel preacher has ever been?" I can see how that would

create a problem, except for one thing: — There are no problems with God! He knows exactly how to get his prophet to the people to whom he has purposed to show his mercy. Just ask Jonah!

We preach the gospel with a sense of urgency, knowing that sinners cannot believe on Christ until Christ is preached to them. Yet, we preach with confidence of success, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). God's Word will not return to him void. It will accomplish his will and prosper in the thing it is sent to do (Isaiah 55:11). Every chosen, redeemed sinner must be regenerated and called by the Holy Spirit. And that work will be accomplished through the preaching of the gospel.

The Spirit of God

But, if we would know Christ, there must be more than the Word of God. We must have the Word made effectual to us by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit. Look at the text at the head of this chapter again. Not only did John the Baptist have the testimony of God's Word, he had God's Word confirmed to him personally by the Holy Spirit. — He saw, as God said he would, "*the Spirit descending and remaining on*" the Lord Jesus. Is this not the work of God the Holy Spirit? Is this not exactly what he has done for us in the blessed operations of his saving grace upon us and in us? (See John 14:22-23; 15:26; 16:8-11, 13-15).

Faith in Christ

Then, as soon as Christ was revealed, he saw, he beheld Christ, he knew him by the gift of faith. This is what he tells us in verse 34. — "*And I saw, and bare record (confessed) that this is the Son of God.*" Read Zechariah 12:10. In the new birth, in the conversion of sinners, this is always the divinely ordained equation: the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and faith in Christ. All are the gifts of God's grace. All are necessary. And all are made effectual to the saving of our souls by the grace of God.

The words of John the apostle, explaining the experience of John the Baptist, were prophetic of every believer's experience of grace. When John baptized the Lord Jesus and saw him owned by God the Father with a voice from heaven and the Spirit descending on him as a dove, he understood that "*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (v. 14). He recognized this man from Galilee for who he was, based on the Word of God and by the revelation of God. And he saw in the baptism of our Lord the symbolic picture of righteousness fulfilled by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the sinners Substitute (Matthew 3:13-17).

As if to reiterate this truth, John tells us that those first men who were found of Christ, who found him by the faith he gave them when he made himself known to them, experienced the same thing (vv. 35-37, 40-41, 43-45, 49).

Sovereign Election

There is yet another distinction concerning the revelation of Christ by the Spirit, through the Word. In verse 26 John the Baptist said to the Pharisees, "I know him *whom ye know not.*"

Looking at this entire chapter, and others like it, we see that Christ is revealed to those sinners he has chosen, redeemed, and called (Acts 2:39; 13:48; Galatians 1:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 5:16).

Gospel Preaching

All true preaching is, for this reason, limited to the declaration of the Gospel. It is by the preaching of the Gospel that the Word of God is declared to men (1 Peter 1:25). The preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of the Word of God is the declaration of a Person, the declaration of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the sinner's Savior. It is declaring the record that God has given concerning his Son (Romans 1:1-3).

- It is the declaration of a unique Person; a man who is like no other; a man who lived like no other, spoke like no other, and died like no other.
- It is the declaration of a man who is himself God.
- It is the declaration of the eternal Surety of a chosen people.
- It is the description of the God-man, who came into the world to seek and save that which was lost, who came into the world to save sinners.
- It is the description of Jehovah's Servant, the Christ, who finished the work that he came to do.
- It is the declaration of Jesus the Savior, who saved all whom he came to save, who loses none who were given to him by the Father, but raises them up in the last day.
- It is the declaration of the man, that wonderful man who lived among sinners without sin, who was made sin for us and is made the righteousness of God unto us.
- It is the description of that man who was and is the Friend of sinners.
- It is the declaration of him who "*shall not fail*," for whom failure is never a possibility.
- It is the description of him who died, and was buried, and rose again that he might be Lord of both the living and the dead.
- It is the description of him who is, at this moment, seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, ruling with absolute sway over everything that wriggles and writhes in the whole universe, ruling in calm repose (Numbers 23:9).
- It is the description of him whose very words are spirit and life.
- It is the description of him about whom every line, every word, every jot, and every tittle of the Bible is written.
- It is the description of him who, by the sacrifice of himself, has put away our sins and has "*made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*."
- It is the description of him who satisfied the law and justice of God for his people so fully, so infinitely, that the Judge of the all the earth declares them never to have sinned, and accepts them fully as sons and daughters!
- It is the declaration, the description of him who is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.
- It is the description of him for whom heaven opens and the voice of God declares "*this is my beloved son, hear ye him*."

We preach him, and preach him, and preach him so that when he comes to his chosen, his redeemed, his called, they will immediately recognize him for who he is, and cry with old

Thomas, “*my Lord and my God!*” We preach that those who hear can say, “I knew him not, but I now know him, because the Word of God has described him so fully that none other will fit the description, because the Spirit of God has revealed him in me, and has given me faith to know and trust him!”

When he comes to his own, their testimony is that God has hung flesh on his Word and “*we behold his glory, as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!*” We keep on preaching him so that every nook and cranny of the believer’s existence will be immersed in him (Romans 11:36). We preach him so that every turn of providence, every happenstance, circumstance, and every occurrence will be seen as his hand of love and tender care (Romans 8:28; Colossians 1:16-17).

I often hear people extolling preachers for being so “practical,” for teaching “practical truths” on how to live the Christian life. They tell how the preacher comforts them and makes their struggles easier. They talk about how their pastor preaches in an understandable manner, showing them what to do and what not to do in order to be “real Christians.” But in all the preacher praise and promotion I hear, seldom do I hear a man praised because he preaches Christ fully and clearly in all his redeeming, saving glory.

The Bible may be used to show men and women what to do and what not to do. It is full of moral principles. Peoples’ lives will be radically changed, if they abide by the principles that are taught in the blessed Book. They will probably never be sent to the penitentiary. Moral teachings, however, focus on you. They fix the mind and the eye on self and looking at self. But they will never cause anyone to know Christ in grace or in providence. We preach Christ and him crucified so that sinners might see him and know him, “*that all men through him might believe*” and worship him whom we preach (1 Corinthians 2:2-5; 2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

Can you say, with John the Baptist, “*I knew him not,*” but now I know him (2 Corinthians 5:16-17; John 17:3), because the Spirit of God has opened and applied to me the Word of God, giving me faith in him who is the Christ of God”? Oh, may God the Holy Spirit grant you grace to know my Savior!

Chapter 12

Peter's Four Calls

“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! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. 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 Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” (John 1:35-42)

In these few short verses we have the beginning of the New Testament church, the calling of the Savior's first disciples. These first three disciples are Andrew and his brother Simon. The third disciple, that unnamed man who with Andrew left John the Baptist and “*followed Jesus,*” was probably the Apostle John, who always preferred to conceal his identity, never referring to himself by name. As we look at this passage of Scripture together, I will call your attention to five things set before us by the Spirit of God.

Faithful Preaching

First, the Spirit of God here shows us an example of faithful preaching (vv. 35-37). The first time that John the Baptist cried, “*Behold the Lamb of John God,*” it appears that no one heard his message. No one began following Christ. None obeyed the preacher. None believed on the Son of God.

What did John do? Did he quit preaching? No. Did he decide that preaching was now out of date, that educated people required something more than preaching? No. John just kept on doing what he had been doing, what he was sent to do. The next day, he saw the Savior passing by. Again, he pointed to him and cried, “*Behold the lamb of God!*”

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, that Lamb portrayed in all the Scriptures, who has, by the sacrifice of himself, put away sin. He is the Lamb set forth in the paschal lamb and typified by that lamb of the morning and evening sacrifices offered every day in the temple at Jerusalem. He is that Lamb without blemish and without spot, who was foreordained as our sin-atoning Sacrifice and Substitute (1 Peter 1:19). • In his humiliation, he is the Lamb of sacrifice. • In his resurrection, he is the prevailing Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). • As the King of Zion, he is the Ruler of heaven and earth to whom every man must send a lamb (Isaiah 16:1).

God's servants never adjust or alter their message for any reason. Whether men hear or refuse to hear, we will not change our message to suit them. John cried, “*Behold the Lamb of*

God that taketh away the sin of the world.” It appears that no one responded in any way to his message. So the next day, he went out and preached the very same message. That day, two men heard him and believed. Those two men left John and “*followed Jesus.*”

I have no doubt these things are recorded in Holy Scripture to show us by example how God’s servants serve the souls of men. It is by the preaching of Christ that sinners are converted. It is by Gospel preaching that God calls out his elect. It is by the preaching of the cross that eternity bound sinners are snatched from the clutches of Satan as brands from the burning (1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5; 9:16; Galatians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2). The preaching of the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Nothing else is!

It is by this means, the foolishness of preaching, that God has ordained the salvation of chosen sinners (Romans 10:17). Let the world laugh and mock. We will not lay aside this mighty weapon of warfare against the gates of hell. It is like the ram’s horns by which the walls of Jericho fell down. The preaching of the Gospel, the blowing of the jubilee trumpet, is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. The story of the crucified Lamb of God has proved to be the power of God unto salvation in every age. Those who have done most for Christ’s cause in every part of the world have been men like John the Baptist. They have not cried, Behold me, or Behold the church, or Behold the ordinances, but “Behold the Lamb of God.” If souls are to be saved, men must be pointed directly to Christ, the Lamb of God!

Let every preacher of the gospel patiently continue in his labor, preaching Christ. Preach him again and again, as the “*Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*” The story of grace must be told repeatedly, line upon line and precept upon precept. God’s Word shall not return unto him void (Isaiah 55:11).

True Christianity

Second, we see in the conduct of these two disciples a picture of true Christianity. We are told that these two men “*followed Jesus.*” The Savior graciously received them and made himself known to them as they followed him. This was the most blessed day of their lives. From that day on, these two men were Christ’s men. They took up the cross, and followed him.

They continued with him in his temptations. They followed him wherever he went. They became chosen Apostles, master builders in the temple of grace. Christianity is following Christ, no more and no less than following Christ. Believers are people who “*follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.*” We seek in all things to follow the doctrine of Christ and the example of Christ (John 13:1-17; Ephesians 4:32-5:2), by the Spirit of Christ. True Christians are people who follow Christ; and they follow him to the end.

Christ’s Abode

Third, we see these two disciples as they are received and taught by the Master (vv. 38-39).

“Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?”

He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.”

The Master asked them what they were seeking, not because he needed to know, but because they needed to know. Take the Savior’s question personally. — “*What seek ye?*” What is it that you are seeking? Watch their answer. It may seem a strange response to some. To others it is the very response of their own hearts. — They said, this is the thing we must know, “*Master, where dwellest thou?*”

Is this the earnest quest of your soul? Do you cry like Job of old, “*Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat*” (Job 23:3)? The Master says, “*Come and see.*” — Come, follow me, and you shall see! Let me show you where he dwells (Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 18:20; Revelation 3:20). — His dwelling place is his people

(Isaiah 57:15) “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Has God, by his Spirit, caused you to hear the Savior’s voice and open to him? Has he broken you and made you contrite before him? I beg for such grace in my soul! May God the Holy Spirit make me what my Father would have me to be, that the triune God may ever dwell in me! The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain our God! the infinite Spirit! Yet, he promises to dwell with his people on the earth, the broken-hearted, the humble, and the contrite. Oh for grace and a sanctity of heart and mind to possess such mercies and be the dwelling place of God! If we are God’s, our bodies are the temple of God who dwells in us!

Still, there is more. The Lord’s dwelling place is our meeting place, the church of the living God, the assembly of his saints in holy worship (Matthew 18:20; Revelation 3:20; 1 Corinthians 3:16). There is only one place on earth where God our Savior has promised to meet with and manifest himself to his people, and that place is the assembly of his saints for public worship. Blessed are they who have the privilege of meeting with the saints of God in the house of God to hear the gospel of God to worship the living God. Wherever such gatherings are found, the Spirit of God is present, Christ our Savior is present, and our heavenly Father is present!

Christ’s Witness

Fourth, as soon as Andrew found Christ he became the faithful witness of Christ. He went out and found his brother Simon and brought him to the Savior (vv. 40-42). Andrew said to his brother Simon, “*We have found the Messiah, the Christ!*” We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote: — The Lamb of God — The Woman’s Seed — Abraham’s Seed — The One Manoah Saw — The True Nazarite — Jehovah’s Servant — The Firstborn — The One Isaiah Saw in His Glory, the Substitute — David’s Son, his Lord — God’s Salvation!

Like one who has unexpectedly heard good news, he ran to tell it to his brother, the one nearest and dearest to him. His heart was full of excitement. He had to tell what he knew. And by his testimony, Peter first received light. Peter was brought to the Savior by the testimony of his

brother. He saw no mighty miracle wrought. He was not convinced by any powerful reasoning. He simply heard his brother tell him that he had found the Savior. The simple witness of a caring brother was the first link in the chain by which Peter was drawn out of the world and joined to Christ.

May God the Holy Spirit make Andrews of all his saints! Well it would be for immortal souls if all who have been converted themselves would speak to their friends and relatives and tell them they have found the Christ. How much good might be done? How many might be led to the Lord? The work of testifying the gospel of the grace of God ought not to be left to preachers alone. All who have received mercy ought to find a tongue and declare what God has done for their souls. All who have been delivered from the power of the devil ought to “*go home and tell their friends what great things God has done for them*” (Mark 5:19). Every believer ought to be a missionary to his family, children, neighbors, and friends.

“*We have found the Christ.*” Do not be afraid of such a statement. All who have found the Christ have been found of Christ, and know that they have been found of him. And all who seek him by faith shall find him (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of thee.”

Peter’s Calls

Fifth, I want you to see that this man Peter experienced four gracious, distinct calls from the Lord. They were given and experienced in a certain order; and both the calls themselves and the order in which they were given are instructive.

1. **Peter was called to become a follower of Christ, a disciple, by the testimony of his brother, Andrew.**

That is what we have before us in John 1. — This is the beginning of grace in the soul. The Lord Jesus Christ begins by first teaching us who we are, showing us our sin, and causing us to know our need of him, and our own sin. Then he reveals himself to us as the Lamb of God, who has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

2. **In the fourth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel Peter was called by the Lord Jesus, along with his brother Andrew, to abandon all earthly pursuits and devote himself entirely to the cause of Christ as a preacher of the gospel with him** (Matthew 4:17-22).

Both Peter and Andrew were believers, true disciples, before they were called to be preachers. They were industrious, laboring men, serving the Lord as fishermen, when he called them to be fishers of men. Those men God puts in the work of the ministry are not lazy dolts, but responsible men who work.

3. **The Lord Jesus called Peter to be an Apostle** (Mark 3:13-16).

Some men God sets apart for very special purposes, for works for which he alone can equip them. Certainly, that was true regarding the Prophets and the Apostles of old. Such men, being called of God to very great work, stand in the forefront of the Master's army. That means that they are sure to bear the full force of Satan's assaults. Peter was just such a man; and he once failed and fell miserably. The Lord Jesus, you will remember, warned him of what he must endure, assuring him that he had prayed for him. Then he said to Peter, "*And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*" (Luke 22:32; John 13:37-14:3).

4. **In John 21 we read of Peter's fourth call, the faithful Savior's sweet, gracious call of restoration, a call every heaven born soul is sure to need, sooner or later** (John 21:1-18).

Blessed Savior, what reason have we to lift our hearts with gratitude and praise to you, because you will never leave us to ourselves! As you restored Peter from his horrible fall, so you alone are the Restorer of our poor souls in our countless falls!

It is a great mercy of our God that we commonly fail to appreciate, a mercy for which none of us are sufficiently thankful that the Lord God graciously hedges us about with strong restraints of providence and omnipotent grace, keeping his people from those grave, outward sins that give Zion's enemies occasion to blaspheme the name our God and mock his gospel. He plants his fear deep in the heart and causes a well of living water to flow through the soul, and keeps us (for the most part) from great acts of iniquity in our outward lives. How we ought to thank him for this great mercy every day, every hour, every moment!

Yes, it is true, sometimes that man who has found grace in the eyes of the Lord will be found in a drunken stupor, with his shame uncovered, in naked sin before the reprobate; and the reprobate will have a hey-day exposing the shame. Sometimes a man of great faith will choose to pitch his tent toward Sodom and choose to stay in the chosen place of wickedness. Sometimes the mighty Samson will lay his head in Delilah's lap. It has happened that a man after God's own heart has committed adultery and even murder. Sometimes even the wisest man upon the earth will bow to the will of a wicked wife and worship at the altar of an idol. Once in a while a great and truly faithful preacher of the gospel, like Peter, will deny the Lord Jesus. Sometimes the most soundly orthodox and most useful and most used of preachers will shave his head and take a Jewish vow.

Such sad falls do occur. They are plainly recorded in Holy Scripture for our learning and admonition; but they are not common occurrences. For the most part, God's saints in this world are graciously kept from such outward displays of iniquity and sin by the restraints his grace and his providence.

Yet, though we are usually kept from grave and gross outward wickedness, the righteous do fall and all who are righteous know that they fall seven times in a day. — "*A just man falleth seven times*" (Proverbs 24:16). — "*Seven times!*" That is to say, — "In the totality of his being,

in all that he is and does, the righteous man, the just one continually falls.” Still, Christ is our Keeper and the Restorer of our souls. — *“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD [shall be] a light unto me”* (Micah 7:8).

Chapter 13

“No Guile” — No Exaggeration!

“The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. 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. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 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. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. 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 heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” (John 1:43-51)

When the Lord Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said something that demands our attention. The Son of God, who sees all and knows all, he from whom nothing can be hid, before whose eyes all things are naked and opened, says of this man Nathanael, “*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*”

Only four times in Holy Scripture do we read of people being free of guile; here, in Psalm 32:2; 1 Peter 2:22, and in Revelation 14:5. In Psalm 32 we are told that the forgiven sinner is one in whose spirit there is no guile. In 1 Peter 2:22 the Holy Spirit tells us that our Lord Jesus had no guile. And in Revelation 14:5 we are told that those who stand before God in heaven have no guile. We read in Revelation 21:27 that none can enter that blessed place called heaven who have any guile, but only those whose names were written as perfect and without guile in “*the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 21:27).

All who are accepted of God are without guile; and when God declares them without guile, there is no exaggeration in the declaration.

In this portion of Holy Scripture the Spirit of God tells us about the Lord Jesus calling two of his early disciples, Philip and Nathanael. Everything in these verses is precious, sweet and instructive. May God the Spirit write their lessons upon our hearts.

“Jesus Would”

First, we are told that the Lord Jesus came into Galilee because he would. — “*The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee*” (v. 43). It was his will, resolution, and determination to return to Galilee. Everything our Lord did was on purpose, and everything he does now is on purpose. It was his will, his determined, unalterable purpose, to come to Galilee, there to begin his

ministry and his miracles in fulfilment of the Scriptures (Isaiah 9:1-2). It was his will to come to Galilee because Philip and Nathanael were both in Galilee, and the time had now come when Philip and Nathaniel must be called.

Look at verses 43-45. We are told plainly that the Lord Jesus found Philip in verse 43. Then, in verse 45 Philip told Nathanael, "*We have found the Messiah.*" Which is true? Did the Savior find Philip, or did Philip find him? Without question, all who get Christ seek him. Seeking him with all our hearts, we find him (Jeremiah 29:11-14). Then, finding him, we discover that we began seeking him because he had found us by his grace. Knowing where he was, as the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, the Lord Jesus looked Philip up, found him out, and called him by his grace. When he was found of the Savior, Philip found the Savior. All who are saved, are saved by the will of God our Savior; and they gladly acknowledge that to be the case (Romans 9:16; John 15:16).

"I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true,
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,—
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovedst me."

Same but Different

Second, we see in the experiences of Philip and Nathanael that, though all God's elect experience the same saving operations of his grace, our experiences are all somewhat different. Every saved sinner's experience of grace is as singular as his finger prints.

We are told here of a man named Philip being added to the Lord's disciples. But unlike Andrew and Peter and John, Philip was called directly by Christ himself. He does not appear to have been one of those influenced by the ministry of John the Baptist. Philip was not brought to the Savior by the witness of a faithful and zealous brother or friend. Yet, his faith in Christ was just as true as that of Andrew, Peter and John. They embraced the same Savior, believed the same gospel, served the same Master, and reached the same home at last; but each one experienced God's salvation a little differently.

That fact is very important. It throws light on the history of all God's people in every age, and of every tongue. There are diversities of operations in the saving of souls. All true Christians are led by one Spirit, washed in one blood, serve one Lord, lean on one Savior, and believe one

gospel. All are saved by the same grace, through the same blood, by the same Spirit, and have the same Savior; but all are not converted in precisely the same way. The experience of grace differs. In conversion the Holy Spirit acts as a sovereign. He calls every one severally as he will. A recognition of this would save us much trouble. We must beware of making the experience of other believers the measure of our own; and we must beware of denying another's grace because his experience is not the same as ours. — "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" That is the only question of importance.

Christ in the Old Testament

Third, the Holy Spirit here reminds us that the message of the Old Testament is the same as that of the New: — Christ crucified. We do not have the old Bible and the new Bible. The Bible, the Word of God, is one; and its message is one. It is the gospel of Christ. When Philip described Christ to Nathanael, he said, — "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*" (v. 45).

All the Old Testament speaks of just one "*Him*." Christ is the sum and substance of the Old Testament. To him the earliest promises pointed in the days of Adam, Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To him every sacrifice pointed in the ceremonial worship appointed at Mount Sinai. Of him every high priest was a type, every part of the tabernacle was a shadow, and every judge and deliverer of Israel was a picture.

If we read only that which was written by Moses in the books of the law, the Pentateuch, we would see the Christ everywhere in the first five Books of the Bible. He is the Seed of the woman that would break the serpent's head, and the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations would be blessed. He is Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people would be, and the great Prophet like Moses himself, whom God would raise up among the children of Israel, whom they would obey

Not only is Christ crucified the message of Moses, he is the message of all the prophets. — "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.*" All the law and all the prophets spoke of him. They wrote of his birth through a virgin's womb and the place of his birth, Bethlehem. The prophets spoke of the Savior's sufferings and the glory that should follow. And they wrote about his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven and exaltation at the right hand of God, and many things relating to his person, offices, and work as Jehovah's righteous servant.

They described him plainly as the King of the house of David, who came to be David's Lord as well as his son. He is the Lamb foretold by Isaiah, the righteous Branch mentioned by Jeremiah, the true Shepherd described by Ezekiel, the Messenger of the Covenant promised by Malachi, and the Messiah who according to Daniel was to be cut off, not for himself, but for the people.

If you want to know who those saints of old trusted, just read the Old Testament. When Philip said to Nathanael, "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write,*" Nathanael knew immediately that Philip was saying, "Nathanael, we have found the

Christ!” The Person they all saw afar off, on whom they all fixed their eyes, was one and the same Christ we trust and worship. The Spirit which was in them testified of Christ (1 Peter 1:11).

Do we find it difficult to see Christ in the Old Testament? If we do, the fault is all our own. It is our spiritual blindness and ignorance that is to blame, not the imaginary ambiguity of the Book. The eyes of our understanding need to be enlightened. The veil needs to be taken away. Let us pray, as we open this Book, “O Spirit of God, open this Book to my heart and open my heart to this Book. Take the things of Christ written upon these pages and show them to me.” The whole Book of God is about our Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious accomplishments as our God-man Mediator (John 5:39).

The Nazarite

Then, having given this general account of him, Philip proceeds to name him particularly and affirms that the Christ, the Messiah, is “*Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*” His name is Jesus, Savior, of Nazareth. This is that One who is the Nazarene. In God’s wise and good providence, our Savior was brought to Nazareth as a baby by Joseph that he might in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy be called a Nazarene (Numbers 6). Let me show you something here. Turn to Matthew 2:23.

“*And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene*” (Matthew 2:23). — Where in the Old Testament is there a prophecy that says, “*He shall be called a Nazarene*”? Have you ever tried to find such a prophecy? If you have, I am sure you were perplexed, because there is no such statement in the Old Testament. In fact, the statement is not found anywhere in the Bible, except in Matthew 2:23. The town of Nazareth was such a small, insignificant place in Zebulun that it is not even mentioned in the Old Testament. So where did Matthew get the idea that the Old Testament prophesied, “*He shall be called a Nazarene*”? Did he take an oral tradition and call it a prophecy of the Old Testament? Was he mistaken? Is this an error found in the Bible? Such questions cannot be considered by one who believes God.

Must we simply say to ourselves, — “The fact that I cannot find where it is written in the Old Testament that “*He shall be called a Nazarene*” does not mean anything. Matthew wrote it by divine inspiration. God the Holy Spirit who inspired this sentence is the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Old Testament writings; and he knows what he wrote better than I do.” That’s a pretty good way to handle the text. In fact, that is exactly the way I have handled it for years.

But the fact that the Spirit of God says it is there means that it is there. This is a prophecy written in bold letters throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, “*He shall be called a Nazarene.*” Everything regarding the law of the Nazarites, as well as the whole Volume of the Old Testament Scriptures, declares that he who is the Christ is that One who is pre-eminently the Nazarite, the Separated One. The Jews, contemptuously, called our Redeemer the Nazarite or Nazarene. Spitting on the ground in disgust, his detractors hissed out the name “Nazarene,” as if it were the climax of contempt. Yet, that blessed Nazarene, triumphant and glorious, “*Jesus of Nazareth,*” is that One whose glory is great in salvation! His is the greatest name among men.

Blind Bartimaeus understood perfectly well that the Christ, the Messiah, would be called “*The Nazarene*.” When he heard that it was “*Jesus of Nazareth*” who passed his way in Jericho, his heart was filled with hope of mercy from “*the Son of David*” (Mark 10:46-48). Dishonored by his foes, he is adored among his friends. While others deride him as “a Nazarene,” we adore him as Christ the Nazarene, Jehovah-Jesus, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

This great Savior is the Nazarene (Numbers 6), our mighty, all-glorious Samson. In his death as our Substitute, he destroyed our enemies. In his resurrection, on the third day after his death, he awoke and carried away the gates of the city (bolt, bar, and posts!) unto a high mountain.

The gates Samson carried away, we are told, were ninety feet across. Yet, Samson snatched them out of the ground, carried them on his shoulders up a mountain next to Hebron some twenty miles; but, by comparison, that was nothing! Our all-glorious Christ was laid in the sepulchre. It was sealed with a huge stone. Soldiers were appointed to keep watch over the tomb, while all hell trembled. Yet, at the appointed time, he arose from the dead, broke the iron bars of death, hell, and the grave, and ascended up into heaven, and laid claim to glory land as our Representative and Forerunner, declaring himself the victorious, all-glorious Son of God, the Sun of Righteousness arisen with healing under his wings! Under all that weight and burden of our sin, he never even staggered!

Skepticism Answered

Fourth, in verse 46 we see the best reply that one can ever give to skepticism. Nathanael’s mind was full of doubts about the Savior, of whom Philip spoke. “*Can there any good thing,*” he said, “*come out of Nazareth?*” To Nathanael’s skepticism, Philip replied, “*Come and see.*” In verse 39, when Andrew and John asked him where he dwelt, our Lord Jesus said to them, “*Come and see.*” But there the words are slightly different. Our Savior’s words in verse 39 are emphatic and sure. He said, “*Come and you shall see.*” Philip’s words to Nathanael, though the same in English, are different in the Greek text. Philip’s words essentially mean, “The only way to see for yourself is to come to him. Come and maybe he will give you eyes to see. But if you refuse to come, you will never see.”

Wiser counsel he could not have given. If Philip reasoned with Nathanael, he could not have made him see. But by urging him to come, to prove the matter for himself, he showed his entire confidence in the truth of his own assertion and his willingness to have it tested and proved.

We should never be afraid to deal with people about their souls just as Philip dealt with Nathanael. Indeed, always deal with immortal souls this way. — “*Come and see.*” We have no secrets. We have nothing to conceal. “*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*” Those who do the most good for immortal souls are simple believers who say to their friends, “I have found a Savior; come and see him.”

Greater Things

Fifth, in the last verses of this portion of Scripture Nathanael saw a great display of Christ's eternal Godhead, in his great omniscience, a display by which Nathaniel was convinced that he is indeed the Christ. But our Savior told him that he would see something greater than that (vv. 47-51).

This promise is our Lord's promise to all who believe him. — *"Thou shalt see greater things than these... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."* With those words, our Lord Jesus promises sweet Bethel-visits, like the ladder of Jacob, to all his redeemed. These sweet visits by which he proves himself over and over to our souls are greater things than the mere revelation of divine omniscience and omnipotence. Even the demons have those revelations. But only saved sinners find all the blessings of grace descending from heaven in Christ and realize that they descend only because all the demands of God's law and justice ascended with Christ.

No Guile

Now, let me draw your attention to our Savior's words about this man Nathanael in verse 47. — *"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"* Nathanael made no protest, but seemed to recognize immediately that the Lord Jesus truly knew him.

First, the Lord Jesus tells us that Nathanael was an Israelite indeed. He was not simply one who was a physical descendant of Abraham (Romans 9:6), but an Israelite indeed, one of the *"children of promise"* (Galatians 4:28), one of *"the Israel of God,"* of Abraham's spiritual seed, one of God's true Israel, an heir of covenant grace.

The *second* thing our Lord Jesus says about Nathanael is the matter of great importance. — *"Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile."* We are often urged to be without guile. But here our Lord declares of a man, *"Behold no guile!"* How are we to take those words? Guile is hypocrisy, deceit, cunning, craftiness, duplicity, dishonesty. Does our Savior mean for us to understand that Nathanael had no guile?

In Psalm 32:1-2 we discover that a man in whom there is no guile is a man who is forgiven of all sin by the precious, sin-atoning blood of Christ (Romans 4:8). Nathanael was a true child of God, a true believer in difficult times. He was one of a very little flock. Like Simeon and Anna, he was living by faith and waiting prayerfully for the promised Redeemer when our Lord began his ministry. He had that which grace alone can give, an honest heart, a heart without guile.

Without question, pardoned sinners are upright, righteous, and without guile in the course of their lives. They are not dishonest, hypocritical people. The Lord God declares of all his children that they are *"children that will not lie"* (Isaiah 63:8). But that cannot be our Lord's meaning here. He here declares that Nathanael was a man in whom there was *"no guile"* and asserts that they and only they in whom is no guile are true Israelites. Yet, every heaven-born soul knows the plague of his own heart. All who are taught of God know that they are, by nature, full of guile.

When our Lord declares that Nathanael is without guile and asserts that all who are Israelites indeed have no guile, was he exaggerating, or was he stating the truth? He was stating the truth, pure, absolute truth. All who trust Christ are Israelites indeed (Philippians 3:3). And all God's elect are a people in whom there is no guile, no duplicity, no hypocrisy, nothing false. This is not a declaration of personal, or personally accomplished holiness. Those who know the plague of their own hearts know better. God's people are a people with no guile...

- Representatively — We stand guileless before the holy Lord God because we are in Christ, one with Christ.
- Eternally — We have been accepted in Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, from eternity, "*accepted in the Beloved*" (Ephesians 1:3-6).
- In their Record — The Lord God declares that there is no sin, no iniquity, no guile recorded against us in the record books of heaven (Jeremiah 50:20).
- In Spirit — In the new birth God the Holy Spirit creates in the chosen, redeemed sinner a new nature that is truly righteous and holy, a nature that cannot sin (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; 1 John 3:6-10). That new nature is "*Christ in you*" (Colossians 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4).

Because they are in Christ and Christ is in them, every saved sinner is, like Nathanael, an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. Are you an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile?

Chapter 14

Glory Revealed — The Creation of Faith

“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. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do [it]. 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 [it]. 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, 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. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” (John 2:1-11)

Here we see the Lord Jesus performing his first miracle, turning water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. In performing this miracle the Holy Spirit specifically tells us in verse 11 that “*Jesus manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.*” I take those words to mean that our faith in Christ is created and sustained by the manifestation of his glory to us.

Practical Lessons

Without question, there are several very practical lessons to be drawn from that which is recorded in John 2:1-11. Like all the miracles that were to follow, “*this beginning of miracles,*” performed by our Savior just a few days after he began his public ministry, “*manifested forth his glory*” and is preserved upon the pages of Inspiration for our instruction and edification. In this miracle there are five things for us to learn.

1. **The Omnipotence of Our Lord Jesus Christ** — Our Savior turned the water into wine, not by his touch, or even by his word, but his will. No prophet or apostle ever did such a thing. He who can turn ordinary water into extra ordinary wine, by a mere act of his will, is the omnipotent God. If he wills my salvation, none can prevent it. If he wills my safety, none can harm me. If he wills my everlasting inheritance in heavenly glory (And he does. – John 17:24), I cannot fail to attain it.
2. **The High Honor Our Lord Places upon Marriage** — By his presence at the marriage feast, the Son of God said, “This is an honorable thing” (Genesis 1:28; 2:18-25; Hebrews 13:4). One of the first steps toward moral decadence in any society is a low esteem for this ordinance of God. Where there is no sanctity of marriage, there is no regard for God or his

law, no regard for moral decency, and no regard for human life. These things stand and fall together!

3. **The Propriety of Feasting and Laughter** — In this passage of Scripture the Son of God gives his approval both to the party and to the moderate use of wine. — “*A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry*” (Ecclesiastes 7:19). Christianity was never meant to make people miserable. On the contrary, true Christianity increases real joy among men and makes people happy in this world, as well as in the world to come.
4. **The Blessedness of Obedience to Christ** — “*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it*” (v. 5). The Son of God could have supplied all the wine that was needed without employing these servants. He did not need them! But they would have missed the blessed benefit of being instruments by whom the Son of God brought his miraculous boon of mercy to the wedding guests.
5. **The Character of Christ’s Gifts** — The Son of God always saves the best wine until the last. Marvelous as his grace is, it is only the earnest of our inheritance, a mere foretaste of the glory that is to be revealed in us! In spiritual matters, the best is always kept for the last. The sorrow of repentance is followed by the sweetness of forgiveness. The bitterness of conviction is followed by the gladness of conversion. After the cross follows the crown. After the valley of the shadow of death comes the glory of life eternal with no sorrow, no sin and no death!

Spiritual Significance

Those are very practical things that should not be overlooked; but we should always look beyond the letter of the Word for that which is spiritual. Did you notice that this chapter begins with the word “*and*”? That indicates that what we read about here is closely connected with what we saw in the first chapter. One of the things prominent in Chapter 1 is the failure of Judaism and the turning away from it to Christ. The Priests and Levites came to John to inquire who he was. He said, “*There standeth one among you whom ye know not*” (John 1:19-26). They did not know the forerunner and did not know the Christ (John 1:11).

“*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*” (John 1:11). The Jews were his own nation and all the ordinances of the law (Judaism) were his own things; but neither his own nation nor his own things would have him.

The Holy Spirit uses those exact, same two words, “*his own,*” in John 13:1 to speak of his true people, God’s elect, those who are truly, everlastingly, eternally “*his own.*” — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*”

“*The law and the prophets were until John*” (Luke 16:16). John wound up the Old Testament system. When Christ appeared, Judaism was an empty, meaningless, dead, useless religious form. — Nothing else! The wine was gone. It had given out. Wine in scripture is the emblem of joy (“*Wine maketh glad the heart of man*” Psalm 104:15.). Judaism still existed as a

religious system, but the joy was gone. It gave no comfort to the heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, utterly destitute of joy in God.

They set six water pots before the Lord Jesus. Those empty water pots of stone represent religion without Christ. Six is the number of man. It was on the sixth day man was created. Six is the number of the beast, antichrist (Revelation 13:18). There were six water pots, not seven, the number of perfection. All that was left of Judaism was the flesh. The feasts of the Lord had become the feasts of the Jews (John 2:13).

The water pots were water pots of stone, not silver which speaks of redemption, not gold which symbolizes the Divine glory. And they were empty! These water pots were used by the Jews in their observance of their religious traditions, their various religious washings (v. 6); but they were empty. — Religion without Christ is empty of joy or comfort!

The Spirit of God specifically calls our attention to the fact that this marriage feast took place on the third day. — *“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee”* (v. 1). But he does not tell us when that was. We may deduce that this took place on the third day after John the Baptist first declared, *“Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,”* but we are not specifically told. Why? Is it because there is something significant about the third day? I think so. The third day is the day of resurrection. It was on the third day in creation that the earth was brought forth from its watery grave (Genesis 1:9-11). Our Lord arose from the dead on the third day.

Judging by 2 Peter 3:8, this is the beginning of the third day of time since this Gospel Day began. Could it be that the marriage supper of the Lamb shall take place in this third day? — Perhaps (Hosea 6:1-2).

Another Marriage Feast

I have no idea when it will take place, but I do know that there is a day appointed when that marriage shall take place (Isaiah 54:1-8). The Book of God says, *“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And...these are the true sayings of God”* (Revelation 19:9). Jesus our Savior will be there. All his disciples will be there. And we will never run out of wine!

“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and

give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” (Revelation 19:1-9)

The Wine

The water we are told was made wine (v. 9). The water was not made to look like wine. It was made wine. The water was not made to taste like wine. It was made wine. The water was not treated as though it were wine. It was made wine. Here are three other things made to be what they could never be, had not God done the work.

- “*The Word was made flesh*” (John 1:14).
- Christ was made sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- We have been made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The good wine of the gospel is Christ himself. When he was made sin for us, it was he and he alone who trod the wine-press of his Father’s wrath as our Substitute, when the Lord bruised him and put him to grief. This is the wine that cheers both God and men. When God’s justice took the full draught of Christ’s blood for the sins of his people, the Lord declared himself well pleased. And when the poor sinner, by sovereign grace, is first made to drink of the blood of the Lamb, he feels constrained to cry,

“Hallelujah! I have found Him
Whom my soul so long has craved!
Jesus satisfies my longings,
Through His blood I now am saved.”

Moses’ first miracle turned water into blood, because the law is a ministration of death. Christ’s first miracle turned water into wine, because once he comes into your life, he makes even the most common mercies (water) boons of grace. Truly, the Lord has kept the good wine until now. Never before has my soul been satisfied.

Mary and the Master

It is not accidental that the Scriptures frequently show us incidents of the Lord Jesus gently reproving his mother, even publicly. He knew the papists would arise, seeking to deify Mary. Therefore, the Lord Jesus made it obvious that such heresy is altogether of man’s doing. But do not imagine that the Lord Jesus was being disrespectful to his mother. He called her “*woman*,” because that was the common way to refer to married women respectfully. But Mary seemed to be asserting her parental authority, and the Lord Jesus let her know that that authority over him no longer existed. He teaches men (and women) to cut the apron strings! And Mary accepted the Lord’s rebuke, recognized his right to act as he pleased, and left the matter entirely in his hands. — What a lesson for us!

His Hour

In verse 4 the Savior said to Mary, “*Mine hour is not yet come.*” Seven references are made in the Gospel of John to that “*hour*” (John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 12:27, 16:32, 17:1). Our Lord had lived in quiet seclusion for thirty years. From this point on he would become a public and a marked man. His hour refers to the hour of his suffering and death as our Surety. This is the hour for which the world was made (John 12:27-33; Romans 5:5-11).

The Method of Grace

We have in this story of our Lord turning the water into wine a good picture of God’s method of grace, a picture of the way God saves sinners. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who performed the miracle. Yet, men were called to fetch the pots, fill them with water, draw off the wine, and carry it to the governor of the feast. The means used were human; though the power that performed the miracle was Divine. It may have seemed foolish to fill the pots with water, but water is a symbol of the written word (Ephesians 5:26); and the way to bring joy and comfort to the human heart today is to fill it with the preached word. God will make it effectual (Romans 10:17).

The sinner is empty like the water pots. He receives the water of the written Word at the command of Christ. The water produced the best wine by the power of Christ; and the change wrought in the new birth is a miracle of grace, as clearly miraculous as the water being turned into wine. This miracle manifested forth his glory (v. 11). The governor proclaimed it to be the best wine. Truly the grace and redemption that is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ is far better than the best the world can give.

Glory Revealed

In verse 11 we are told that our Lord Jesus, by performing this miracle, “*manifested forth his glory,*” and when he did, “*his disciples believed on him.*” The long and short of that is just this: — Faith in Christ depends upon and is caused by the revelation of Christ, the manifesting forth of his glory: the glory of his person, the glory of his accomplished redemption, the glory of his all-sufficient grace, and the glory of his transforming, saving power. — The Son of God takes common, ordinary things and transforms them into something that manifests forth his glory (Isaiah 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

May God the Holy Spirit grant us unceasing grace to believe on our Savior! He promises to all who believe that they shall see the glory of God (John 11:40). — “*Come and see!*”

Chapter 15

Fury, Forbearance and Faith

“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days. And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 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. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.”

“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 Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all [men], And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” (John 2:12-25)

“*After this...*” — In the opening verses of this chapter we see our blessed Savior attending a wedding feast in Cana. There he performed his first miracle. Turning water into wine, by the mere exercise of his will, the Lord Jesus supplied all the guests with wine to make their hearts merry.

As we behold our Lord Jesus honoring the bridal feast with his presence and the first miracle he performed as our God-man Mediator, our hearts swell with joy in the consideration of a far more astonishing miracle, the great wonder of his grace when the Son of God first betrothed his Church to himself in righteousness and in judgment, in lovingkindness and in mercies, in faithfulness and forever (Hosea 2:19-20).

As our Lord provided wine for this wedding party, he is, our Ishi, our Husband, ever supplying the wine of his grace to his Church, his Bride, blessing us with his presence, meeting every need, and turning all our earthly water into wine that gladdens our hearts, causing us to believe on him the more. — “*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him*” (v. 11).

Oh, may it please him daily to manifest forth his glory and cause us, by the sweet, effectual influences of his Spirit, to unceasingly believe him!

The Passover

Let's pick up in verse 12. — *“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.”* Our Lord's stay at Capernaum was very brief, because, as we read in verse 13, *“the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”* This was about six months after our Lord's baptism. John is the only Gospel writer who tells us that our Savior went up to Jerusalem to observe the passover four times after his baptism (2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 18:28). Because John identifies these four passovers observed by our Savior, we know that his public ministry lasted about 3½ years.

The Lord Jesus observed those legal feasts, because he came to fulfill the law; and he did fulfill it in every detail as a man. But he fully, completely fulfilled the typical ceremony when he died as our Substitute, at the last passover. There, at Jerusalem, upon Mt. Calvary, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Temple Purged

Our Lord's second miracle is described in verses 14-17. Like the miracle in Cana, this second miracle performed by the Lord Jesus demands our attention. These two miracles are eminently significant as prophetic signs of things to come. At his first coming, the Lord of Glory attended a marriage feast and purged his house, driving out all who profaned the worship of God. When he comes again, the Lord Jesus will hold a marriage feast and purify his Church.

When the Lord Jesus came into the temple, we read that he *“found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”* (vv. 14-17).

Try to picture what our Lord saw when he went into the temple. What a ghastly sight was before him! There, in the temple, in the house of God, in the place where men and women gathered with their families to worship the triune God were caged birds, stalled oxen, and sheep. Hundreds of them! Imagine the stench! Men were selling them as a convenience (and for a profit, of course) to those who were too busy to bother preparing for worship, too busy to bring a suitable sacrifice to God! Money changers were scattered throughout the courtyard and at the entrance of the temple, sitting at tables to exchange money (for a fee, of course), with those who rushed to the service without the shekel of the sanctuary, with which God must be worshipped. All this was going on with the consent of greedy, self-serving priests, who turned the worship of God into a profitable business. These people professed to have a great zeal for the law of God and the things of God; but their pretended zeal sickened and enraged the Lord of Glory.

As the songs of Zion were sung, while the priest read the Word of God, while a man taught the Scriptures, people were talking, making deals, running in and out of the place, as if they were at a sporting event! In a word, as it is today in most religious assemblies, so it was

then. — There was no reverence for God in his house and no reverence for the things of God. The Son of God was enraged by what he saw then; and he is enraged by such irreverence today.

Twice, during the 3½ years of his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus observed the same profane behavior of men in his Father's house, here at the beginning of his ministry and again at the end (Matthew 21:12-13). Twice he showed his contempt for the Jews' irreverence in the strongest terms. "*The thing is doubled,*" J. C. Ryle observed, "in order to impress a lesson more strongly on our minds."

Every time I read about our Lord driving these people out of the temple, I am reminded of the young King Josiah in 2 Kings 22-23 repairing the breaches of the Lord's house, and remember the wise counsel Solomon gives us in Ecclesiastes 5:1. — "*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.*"

The Miracle

Before I get to the spiritual lesson intended by our Lord's action here, let me call your attention to the miracle before us in this passage. It is one of the greatest miracles wrought by the Son of God during his earthly ministry.

Here is the Lord Jesus going through the temple, driving everything before him, literally whipping men and beasts, driving the herds of cattle, overturning tables, and dumping men's money on the floor; and no one dared to resist him, get in his way, or even ask him what he was doing! Their minds must have been utterly overawed by some supernatural display of his invincible power as God. They saw such majesty shining forth in the face of the God-man that they were completely bowed before him. When the Lord's disciples saw what happened, they immediately realized that the Scriptures were being fulfilled before their eyes. — "*For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*" (Psalm 69:9). — "*My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words*" (119:139).

As he drove these self-serving merchandisers out of the temple, with their cattle and their money, the Savior said, in what must have been a loud voice expressing anger, "*Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise!*" No prophet ever used such language. No one but Christ ever called God his Father. And God never called any prophet his Son. This cleansing of the temple by the Christ seems to be precisely what Malachi spoke of in Malachi 3:1-5.

Spiritual Lessons

What are we to learn from this event? What lessons are being taught here? Why has God the Holy Spirit caused this record of our Lord's zeal in purging the temple to be preserved upon the pages of Inspiration? What are the spiritual lessons we are to glean from it?

As you well know, the physical temple at Jerusalem was symbolic of three things: (1.) our Lord's physical body (v. 21), (2.) our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19), and (3.) the assembled Church of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The things we see in John 2 are to be applied to all three.

First, the temple represented each believer's body. After the temple at Jerusalem was left desolate by the Jews' rejection of Christ, the Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost and took possession of one hundred and twenty temples, so that they became the dwelling places of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). We are admonished repeatedly to look upon and use our bodies as God's temple, that which is dedicated to his honor. We must not defile God's temple by immoral behavior or by idolatrous religion (1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

Blessed Spirit of God, we give praise, with our thanks, for this record of our Savior's zeal in purging his temple; and we beg of you our Lord, so cleanse our hearts day by day by your grace! Drive out the vain thoughts that lodge deep within our nature, defiling your dwelling place, defiling your temple. Then, by your indwelling presence, grant us grace to glorify our God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are yours, for you have bought us with your blood!

Second, the temple represented the assembled Church of God, the local Church, gathered for worship (Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Let us take great care that we do not defile the house of God with corrupt behavior, strife, gossip, slander, corrupt religious ceremonies, the wood, hay and stubble of human inventions, or with corrupt doctrine

Christ's Body

But, if we read on in John 2, we see that the temple also represents the physical body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior seems to have shone the beam of his deity, as our mighty Samson, laying heaps upon heaps, as he marched through his house.

“Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 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. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them: and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.” (vv. 18-22)

It appears, from these men asking the Lord Jesus to show them his authority for purging the temple, that they were unwittingly convinced that he was indeed the Christ.¹ Had this not been the case, these men would have been enraged. They would have tried to seize the Savior and kill him, as they often did later. Instead, they did not oppose anything. They made no effort to resist anything he said or did. They simply asked for a sign of his mission as the Christ. — “*What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?*” (v. 18)

If in the days of his humiliation such glory occasionally shined forth in the Lord Jesus as God incarnate, to the utter consternation of his enemies (John 18:6) and the comfort and joy of his saints (Matthew 17:1-5), what will it be like when he comes in his glory (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7)?

¹ If I am not mistaken, this was their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12): — Though they were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, they ascribed to him the works of the devil, rather than bow to him.

Robert Hawker rightly observed, — “Oh! the forbearance of our adorable Lord, when driving those buyers and sellers from the temple, that he drove them not into hell!”

Though he refused to give a sign to the Jews, though he refused to answer the demand of his foes, our dear Savior gave a precious sign to his chosen, for whom he had come to lay down his life. It is for his chosen, for his redeemed, that he does all things. When he spoke of the destruction and raising up again of the temple, God the Holy Spirit tells us plainly that he was talking about his body and his resurrection from the dead three days after his crucifixion as our sin-atoning Substitute. — “*He spake of the temple of his body*” (v. 21; Romans 4:25).

So when the Lord Jesus arose from the dead three years later, his disciples remembered this conversation with the Jews and, by Divine conviction, “*they believed the Scripture, and the word which he had spoken.*” That is another lesson we must not fail to learn from this passage. — The Word of God often has its efficacy long after it is first heard.

It is upon this same testimony that the whole Church of God rests. Our Redeemer was and is “*declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Romans 1:4). This is the Foundation upon which we are built. Christ is our Resurrection and our Life. Because he lives, his redeemed shall live also. Because he lives, I shall live.

As the pillar of cloud and fire at the Red Sea was a light to Israel, but darkness to the Egyptians, this word of our Lord was blinding to the Jews, a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence; but for God’s elect it stands as a blessed testimony to that glorious Rock which Jehovah laid in Zion.

The Jews used these words of our Lord as a charge of blasphemy against him, when he was arraigned before Pilate (Matthew 26:61). But we, being taught of God, see his eternal power and Godhead. “*Destroy this temple,*” he declared, *this temple of my body;* and “*in three days I will raise it up.*” And they destroyed his body when with wicked hands they took our Savior and crucified him (Acts 2:23). Three days later, by his own almighty power, he arose from the dead.

Don’t miss this: — He said, “*I will raise it up!*” Having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it, he raised up his body by the power of the redemption he accomplished in the sacrifice of himself (Acts 2:24). He could not be held in the grave, because the sin he bore in his body on the tree he put away, the debt we owed he fully paid, and the demands of justice he completely satisfied (Romans 4:25-5:5; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18).

Hearts Read

In the last three verses of this chapter we are reminded of this solemn fact: — The Son of God is he who reads and knows the hearts of all.

“Now when he was at Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, And needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.”

Who less than he who made man can know the thoughts of a man’s heart (Hebrews 4:12-13)? You may not know the difference, but he knows the difference between true faith and false faith. Natural faith, faith arising from sight, is a notion of the head. That faith which is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit is the commitment of the heart to Christ.²

Christ knows all things. He knows what is in you. He knows what is in me. He knows us. That fact terrifies, rightly terrifies the hypocrite. But this is a fact that gives indescribable comfort to the believer (John 21:15-17).

² The word translated “*believe*” in verse 23 is exactly the same word translated “*commit*” in verse 24.

Chapter 16

“Born Again” What does that mean?

“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. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 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? 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. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 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 3:1-8)

Much has been said and written about Nicodemus, about him coming to the Lord Jesus by night, and about our Lord’s discourse with him on the new birth. Many debate about whether Nicodemus ever was born again. Much has been said and written about the meaning of the word “*water*” in verse 5. I will deliberately pass by all those things without comment, because I want to focus your attention on our Lord’s message to Nicodemus. His message to Nicodemus is his message to sinners today. It is plain and clear. We have it stated with utmost clarity and simplicity in verse 7. — “*Ye must be born again!*”

“*Born again*” — What does that mean? These days, almost everyone talks about being born again; but virtually no one knows what the Word of God teaches about the new birth. Therefore, I want to address the subject in simple, clear, unmistakable terms. I want all who read these pages to understand what the new birth is and how it is accomplished. More importantly, I want you to be born again. May God be pleased to make it so, for Christ’s sake.

The religious world around us, in its apostate rejection of the truth of God, has made the new birth to be nothing more than making a decision, walking an aisle, and saying a prayer. Because of their abuse and error regarding the new birth, our tendency might be to shy away from using the term “*born again*,” lest we be identified with those who deny the gospel of Christ. But, no matter how much men may pervert the language and the doctrine of Christ, our Lord’s admonition to Nicodemus still stands. It is as necessary and urgent today as it was when he first made it more than two thousand years ago. — “*Ye must be born again!*”

“*Ye must be born again!*” — You may have been in the church for years and yet be without Christ. You may have made a profession of faith a long time ago and still be without life before God. May God the Holy Spirit cause you to hear the Savior’s word to Nicodemus and grant you his grace. — “*Ye must be born again!*” Read those five words, and ask God to give you wisdom and grace to understand what they mean. — “*Ye must be born again!*”

Here is a personal word — “*Ye.*” This message is for you. I know you are moral. I know you are religious. I know that you are well instructed in doctrinal truth. So was Nicodemus. He was a well respected religious leader, a Pharisee, and a ruler among the Jews. Nicodemus was a teacher who taught the teachers. He was a preacher, but more. Nicodemus was a preacher who taught preachers. He was a theologian. This was a man of highest rank in the Jewish church. But he was spiritually dead. He was without life before God. He was totally ignorant of all things spiritual. He was a lost man. If you are yet without life toward God, I have this word from God for you — “*You must be born again.*”

Here is a pressing word — “*Must.*” “*Time is short.*” “*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*” This is not a good recommendation. This is not wholesome advice. This is imperative. This is vital. This is a necessity. “*You must be born again!*” Otherwise, you will perish in your sins. You will die under the wrath of God! Hell will be your portion forever!

Here is a passive word — “*Be.*” The new birth is not something you do. It is something done to you, something God does for you and in you. A man has no more to do with his spiritual birth than he does with his natural birth. In this matter of regeneration man is passive. He has nothing to do with the work (John 1:12-13). You cannot save yourself. You cannot give yourself life. You cannot be born again by something you do (Titus 3:4-6): not by moral reformation, not by baptism, not by religious fervor and devotion, not even by faith in Christ.

Faith in Christ is not the cause of the new birth. It is the result of the new birth. We believe according to the working of God’s mighty power, by the operation of his grace (Ephesians 1:19; 2:8; Colossians 2:11-12). The new birth is something done to you, for you, and in you by God’s sovereign, irresistible grace. It is not something you do. “*You must BE born again!*”

I fully agree with what Martin Luther had to say in this regard. — “If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly.”

Here is a powerful word — “*Born.*” I am talking to you about a gift; but it is not just any ordinary gift. I am talking to you about the gift of life, eternal life. When our Lord declares, “*Ye must be born again,*” he is saying you must be the object and recipient of Divine power. Just as God created the world, God must create life in your soul. Just as God breathed into Adam and made him a living soul, so God must breathe into you the breath of life by his Spirit, or you will perish in your sins. This is what I am saying: — You are spiritually dead, helplessly lost by nature. Your only hope is that God the Holy Spirit will give you life. — “*You must be born again!*”

Here is a profound word — “*Again.*” The new birth is a mystery of grace. It cannot be explained; neither can it be fully understood. It is a work of God beyond our comprehension. When our Lord says, “*Ye must be born again,*” his meaning is twofold. The word again has two meanings. *First*, it means, “You must be born from above.” James tells us that “*every good and*

perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”— Then he tells us what he is teaching in the next verse. — “*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*” (*James 1:17-18*).

Second, it means, “You must be born a second time.” Your first birth was of sinful parents, and you were born in their image. The second birth is of God, and we are born in his image. — The first birth was of corruptible seed. The second birth is of incorruptible seed. — Our first birth is in sin. Our second birth is in righteousness. — By our first birth we were polluted and unclean. By our second birth we become holy. — Our first birth was fleshly and carnal. Our second birth is spiritual and makes us spiritual. — By the first birth all men are foolish and ignorant. By our second birth we become wise unto salvation. — By our first birth we were slaves to sin and the lusts of the flesh. By our second birth we are made free from the dominion of sin. — By our first birth we are all children of wrath. By our second birth we are children of promise. Our Lord says, “*Ye must be born again*,” because we were all born wrong the first time.

Our Lord said, “*Ye must be born again*,” because none shall ever enter into glory except those who are born again by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit and made to live in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order for God to save a sinner two things must be done. God must do something for you. And God must do something in you. Redemption is the work of God for sinners. Regeneration is the work of God in sinners. Both are the works of God. Man has nothing more to do with regeneration than he has to do with redemption. — “*Salvation is of the Lord!*”

“Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.

The sovereign will of God alone
Creates us heirs of grace;
Born in the image of His Son,
A new peculiar race.”

Why?

Why must we be born again? There are many answers to that question in the Word of God. But we will stay with our text. Our Lord gave Nicodemus *three reasons* why he must be born again. These three things make it imperative that you must be born again.

1st Unless you are born again you cannot understand anything spiritual. — “*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (v. 3). The natural man is totally void of spiritual understanding. You may be a logical, reasonable, rational, and well educated person among men, but with regard to the things of God you are as ignorant, foolish, and unreasonable as a madman, unless

you are born again. You have no capacity for spiritual knowledge (Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14). The heart of stone is hard, cold, unbending, unaffected.

You cannot see the spiritual nature of God's law (Matthew 5:21, 27, 38, 43, 48). You cannot see the spiritual nature of sin (Matthew 15:17-19). You cannot see the glory of God in redemption (Romans 3:24-26). You cannot see the spiritual condition of your own heart (Jeremiah 17:9). You cannot see the spiritual nature of salvation. It is a heart work (Ezekiel 36:25-27). You cannot see the spiritual nature of obedience to God (1 Samuel 16:7; Romans 14:17). (All human religion is carnal. It has to do with carnal things.) You cannot see the spiritual nature of faith and worship (Philippians 3:3). You cannot see the true character of God (Exodus 33:18-34:7). You cannot see the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). You cannot see the gospel of the grace of God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

2nd Unless you are born again by almighty grace, you can never enter into the kingdom of God. — *“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”* (v. 5). You can reform your life without the new birth. You can be baptized without the new birth. You can join the church, be zealous in religion, teach a Bible class, serve as a deacon or elder, you can even preach with great success without being born again. But unless you are born again, you will never enter the kingdom of God. You will never be a part of the church and family of God. You will never have eternal life. You will never enter into the worship and fellowship of God's saints. You will never be admitted into the presence of God's glory in the bliss of heaven (Revelation 20:6; 21:27).

3rd All flesh is defiled. — *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (v. 6). All flesh is corrupt. All flesh is sinful. All flesh is condemned. All flesh must die. The flesh is your natural, sinful self (Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:12; Revelation 20:11-15). Unless you are born of the Spirit, you will die in your sins, and your flesh shall be justly damned.

What?

What is the new birth? I cannot explain the mystery of the new birth. It is one of God's incomprehensible works. But there are several things in the Word of God which identify God's regenerating grace.

To be born again is to be raised from the dead (Ephesians 2:1-5). To be born again is to be made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In regeneration a new nature is created in our souls, so that men and women upon the earth are born in the image of God (Galatians 5:22). Christ is formed in us (Colossians 1:27). To be born again is to have Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19). To have eternal life is to have the Lord Jesus Christ living in you (Galatians 2:20). To be born again is to have a good seed implanted in you by grace (1 John 3:9-10). By nature we are all sprung from bad seed — Adam. But in regeneration we are sprung from good Seed — The Lord Jesus Christ.

In a word, to be born again is to be made a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the new birth God gives chosen, redeemed sinners a new heart to know and love God, a new will

to bow to the rule of Christ, a new mind to understand the things of God, a new, spiritual nature to know, enjoy, and live upon spiritual things, new eyes, eyes of faith, with which to see Christ, new ears with which to hear his voice, new hands, hands of faith, with which to lay hold of Christ and do his will, new feet, with which to flee to Christ and walk with him in the newness of life.

Here is the great difference between the law and the gospel. The law demands everything, but gives nothing. The gospel demands nothing, and gives everything!

“‘Run, run and work,’ the law demands,
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands;
But sweet, good news the gospel brings.
It bids me fly, and gives me wings!

With these my heavy soul may fly
Away to Christ and reach the sky,
Nor faint, nor falter in the race,
But work with cheer and sing of grace!”

How?

How are sinners born again by the Spirit of God? Anyone who understands the nature of man and the nature of the new birth realizes that Divine, sovereign power and grace is required to give dead sinners life. Moral reason cannot give sinners life. Eloquence and logic cannot do it. Emotional stirrings cannot regenerate. A mere exercise of the will cannot give the dead life. — *“Ye must be born again.”*

Regeneration is the sovereign, irresistible work of God the Holy Spirit. — *“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”* (v. 8). At the time appointed by God, the Holy Spirit comes to the sinner who was chosen by grace in eternal election and redeemed by Christ at Calvary, and creates life in that sinner by his sovereign, irresistible, effectual grace (Galatians 4:4-7).

The instrument by which the Holy Spirit causes men and women to be born again is the gospel of Christ (vv. 12-16).

“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And 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. 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.” (vv. 12-16)

“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” — “Of his own will begat he us with the Word of Truth.” — Sinners are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever...And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

In preaching the gospel we call upon dead sinners to arise (Ephesians 5:14), knowing full well that the dead cannot hear and obey the command of the gospel. But if God the Holy Spirit will be pleased to speak through his Word, the dead shall hear and live (John 5:25; Revelation 20:6).

Four Pictures

How are lost, dead, helpless sinners born again? If one picture is worth a thousand words, let me point you to four thousand words of explanation given in Holy Scripture. How are sinners born again? You must be born again in the same way and by the same power displayed when...

1. God recreated the world that was in chaos (Genesis 1:1-3).
2. The dead, polluted infant was restored in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 16:6-8).
3. The dried bones Ezekiel saw were raised to life (Ezekiel 37:1-15).
4. Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11:43-44).

Poor, lost, dead sinners are born again by the will of God, by sovereign operations of God the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the gospel (1 Peter 23-25).

When?

When is a sinner born again? I have no interest in answering the foolish questions of men about the chronological sequence of events in a man’s salvation. But I do want to show you when a person may with confidence say, “I am born again by the grace of God.” When you know Christ, you are born again (John 17:3). When you believe on Christ, you are born again (John 3:15, 36; Isaiah 45:22). — *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.”* When you have Christ, you are born again (1 John 5:10-13). Get Christ and you get life. Miss Christ and you miss life.

“How can these things be?”

“Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you [of] heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, [even] the Son of man which is in heaven. And 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. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (John 3:9-21)

In this 3rd chapter of John’s Gospel God the Holy Spirit has recorded for us a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and one of the most learned, well-taught, and highly respected religious leaders of his day, Nicodemus. This is one of the most important passages in all the Bible. Its doctrine is both profound and essential. Nowhere in Scripture are we given stronger statements about the new birth and salvation by faith in Christ than are found here.

In the first part of our Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus he declared the necessity of the new birth, asserting that we must be born again, because until we are born again we cannot see the kingdom of God and cannot enter into it. Without the new birth, no one has the capacity and ability to understand anything spiritual (John 3:3). And without the new birth, without a new, righteous nature being created in us by God the Holy Spirit, we cannot enter into God’s heaven (John 3:5, 7; Hebrews 12:14; Revelation 21:27). — *“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again”* (v. 7).

Then, in verse 8 our Savior showed Nicodemus, and shows us that the new birth is a sovereign act and work of God the Holy Spirit. — *“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.”*

The wind is invisible. We cannot see the wind; but we can certainly feel the effects. Even so, we cannot see the Spirit of God; but his power and the results of his work are evident.

The wind is sovereign in its actions. It is beyond man’s control. The wind does not consult with us and is not regulated by us. So it is with the Spirit of God. The wind blows when it pleases, where it pleases, and as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit (Exodus 33:19; John 5:21).

The wind is irresistible. When the wind blows in its power, it sweeps everything before it. It is so with the Spirit of God. When he comes in the fulness of his power, he breaks down man’s prejudices, subdues his will, conquers him, and sweetly forces him into the arms of Christ. — *“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power”* (Psalm 110:3). — *“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee”* (Psalm 65:4). — *“Salvation is of the Lord”* (Jonah 2:9).

Our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus continues in verses 9-21. His doctrine of regeneration is immediately followed by his doctrine of justification. Here he tells us how sinners obtain God's salvation by faith alone. After declaring the necessity and nature of the new birth to Nicodemus, — "*Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*" (John 3:9) — Our Lord Jesus answers the question in verses 10-21.

Spiritual Ignorance

The first thing set before us in this passage is a glaring display of spiritual ignorance. Here is a man who was "*a master in Israel,*" learned in all matters of religious thought, fully acquainted with all the theological trends of the day, a man of letters and degrees, who was utterly ignorant of all things spiritual (vv. 9-12).

When he was told about the new birth, Nicodemus immediately exclaimed, "*How can these things be?*" This question reveals the spiritual ignorance of all men by nature, even well-trained, academically superior, highly honored men. Nicodemus was very well educated, very religious, and of high moral character and reputation. — "*A Master in Israel!*" Yet, he was spiritually ignorant. If we would understand the things of God, we must have something more than education, morality, and sincerity. We must be taught of God.

Even though God became incarnate and spoke in human language, men understood him not (Proverbs 4:19; Ephesians 4:18). Even preachers, teachers, religious leaders, and theologians may be ignorant of Divine truth. The fact that a preacher has graduated with honors from some theological center is no proof that he is a man taught of God (John 6:44-45).

Nicodemus was one of those pastors in Israel who had ceased to feed the people with knowledge and understanding. The blind were leading the blind, and both were falling into the ditch (Matthew 15:14). The successors of such men are found in every age; and they are abundant today. Let most any preacher or religious leader of our day comment on anything spiritual, and you will have a glaring example of Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 2:14. — "*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.*"

Look at the next verse. After chiding Nicodemus for his ignorance, our Lord shows him the reason for it. It was because he refused to receive the Savior's witness. — "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness*" (v. 11). The reason sinners do not know the things of God is twofold: *First*, they are without the ability to discern anything spiritual. *Second*, they refuse to believe God's revelation of himself.

None are so blind as those who will not see! As we believe God's Word, he gives us understanding of what we believe. As we walk in the light revealed, we are given more light. But, if you receive not the witness of God, you have yourself to blame for your ignorance (John 5:40-44).

Earthly Things and Heavenly

Verse 12 might seem a little confusing. What are those earthly things and those heavenly things our Savior speaks of here?

"*Earthly things*" refer to the new birth, which takes place on earth, and to the "*wind,*" by which he illustrated the Spirit's operations of grace in regeneration. These things Nicodemus ought to have known about from Ezekiel 36:24-27. If he did not believe God's Word about these earthly things, it would be useless to tell him of "*heavenly things,*" of things pertaining to the counsels of God, the mysteries of grace, and the things God has prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

It would certainly be meaningless for our Lord to tell him of those things he had accomplished as the covenant Surety and Mediator of his people. It would be meaningless, that is, unless the Lord himself was pleased to make the Word effectual. Yet, having said that, the Lord proceeds to tell him of heavenly things in verse 13. — *“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”*

These are heavenly things indeed! Here our Savior asserts that he, the God-man, and no other man but the God-man had already ascended up to heaven. He then asserts that he had come down from heaven. And third, he says that he was in heaven, even while he walked upon the earth. Obviously, our Savior is talking here about that which he accomplished before the world began, when he stood forth and was accepted as our covenant Surety, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In a word, our Lord here declared to Nicodemus that the work he came to do on earth was already accomplished by him in heaven (Romans 8:29-30; 10:4-9; Hebrews 4:3).

It is true that both Enoch and Elijah had ascended up to heaven; and all those who had died in faith were already in heaven. But all who are there, and all who ever shall be there are there because of the efficacy and merit of Christ, the God-man Mediator, our Substitute.

Read our Lord’s words in verse 13 again, and rejoice. — *“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”* If no man but Christ ascends to heaven, then all others, except Christ, are shut out of heaven. Is that not right? How, then, can we enter heaven? The Church of God’s elect, the whole election of grace, is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12). We and our Savior, the Church and her Head are one Christ! We are described as *“the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Ephesians 1:23).

Another Necessity

Our Lord Jesus spoke of the necessity of the new birth. — *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”* The new birth is a new creation, the imparting of Divine, or eternal life. It is having a new, righteous nature imparted to us and created in us by God the Holy Spirit. But, before any sinner could be granted such grace, before any could be born of God, something else had to be done. So, *secondly*, our Savior spoke to Nicodemus about another necessity. Before God could do anything for us, he must do something for himself.

“And 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.” (vv. 14-15)

If eternal life is to be bestowed upon us, it must be bestowed upon us righteously and justly. Eternal life could never be bestowed upon men, except by the satisfaction of Divine justice. The Son of God must be lifted up. Eternal life must come out of his substitutionary death. The sacrificial work of Christ is the basis of the Spirit’s operations and the ground of God’s gift of life (Isaiah 53:4-6).

It is the Son of man who must be crucified, for atonement could be made only by one in the nature of him who sinned. Only as man was Christ capable of taking upon himself our guilt and its penalty. The Jews expected the Messiah to be lifted up or elevated to the throne of David; but before this, he must be lifted up on the cross of shame, enduring the judgment of God upon our sins.

To illustrate the character, meaning, and purpose of his death, our dear Savior refers to the well-known incident of the brazen-serpent in Numbers 21:6-9. The people were bitten by fiery serpents, dying, and without hope. Moses made a serpent in the likeness of the cause and lifted it up. Those who looked in faith lived. Christ is made in the likeness of sinful flesh and crucified. The only animal upon whom the Lord God specifically

pronounced his curse was the serpent. So our Lord Jesus who was made sin and made a curse for us was rightly represented by the cursed thing. All who look to him in faith shall live (Isaiah 45:22).

By being “*lifted up*,” our Lord meant nothing less than his own death upon the cursed tree. That death, he would have us know, was appointed by God for “*the life of the world*” (John 6:51). It was ordained from all eternity to be the great propitiation and satisfaction for the sins of his people throughout the whole world. It was the payment of our debt, by an Almighty Substitute and Representative of infinite worth and merit. This is God’s scheme of grace and redemption. In infinite wisdom and goodness he purposed to save sinners by the sin-atoning death of his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross.

When Christ died upon the cross, our many sins were laid upon him. He was made “*sin*” for us. He was made “*a curse*” for us (2Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). By his death he purchased complete pardon for our souls and obtained eternal redemption for us.

The truth set before us here is the very foundation-stone of our faith — Substitution. Christ’s death is our life. His cross is our title to heaven. Christ “*lifted up*” and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which we “*enter into the holiest*” and ascend at last to heavenly glory. We are sinners, but Christ has suffered for us. We deserve death, but Christ has died for us. We are guilty debtors, but Christ has paid our debt with his own blood. This is the good news we preach. This is the gospel we believe. On this let us lean while we live. To this let us cling when we die. Christ has been “*lifted up*” on the cross, and has thrown open the gates of heaven to poor sinners!

The Cause

Third, our blessed Savior shows us that the cause of all this is the love of God.

“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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (vv. 16-17)

The Lord Jesus declared that his death on the cross was an imperative, a necessity. He did not say, “The Son of man shall be lifted up,” but, “*The Son of man must be lifted up.*” There is no other alternative if the claims of God are to be met, if the demands of justice are to be satisfied, if sin is to be put away, and if the elect are to be saved, — Christ must die (Romans 3:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The law and justice of God demand it

John 3:14 declares the remedy for sin. Christ must be lifted up. Verse 15 is the result. — “*Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*” Verse 16 is the reason. — “*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!*”

The cross is a display of righteousness, justice, truth, and holiness; but there is more in the cross of Christ than an exhibition of the holiness of God. The cross is the great display and manifestation of the love of God. John 3:16 takes us back to the very foundation of everything. God’s great salvation was provided by love. Christ came and died because God loved us and was determined to have a people like Christ, not in order to make the Father love us, but because he loved us. The atonement was not the cause but the effect of God’s love (1 John 4:9-10).

“Twas not to make Jehovah’s love
Toward his people flame,
That Jesus from the throne above,
A suffering man became.

Tw'as not the death which he endured,
Nor all the pangs he bore,
That God's eternal love procured,
For God was love before.

He loved the world of His elect,
With love surpassing thought;
Nor will His mercy e'er neglect
The souls so dearly bought!

The warm affections of His breast
Towards His chosen burn;
And in His love He'll ever rest,
Nor from His oath return."

In this 16th verse our Lord tells us seven things about the love of God.

1. The tense of his love. — "*God so loved.*" He always has loved us. It is an everlasting love (Romans 5:8; Jeremiah 33:3).
2. The magnitude of his love. — "*God so loved.*" It is an infinite love (John 15:13).
3. The scope of his love. — "*God so loved the world.*" His love is not limited to the Jews only, but to all nations (Revelation 5:9).
4. The nature of his love. — "*God so loved...that he gave.*" Real love ever seeks the highest interest and well being of its object. Love is unselfish; it gives. God gave the greatest gift.
5. The sacrificial character of his love. He not only gave his Son to live on earth among men, but to die the death of the cross (Philippians 2:6-8).
6. The design of his love. — "*That whosoever believeth on him should not perish.*" God has a people who shall not perish. No condemnation or judgment shall come to them (Romans 8:33-34).
7. The beneficence of his love. — "*But have everlasting life.*" This is what our Lord imparts to his own: — eternal life and glory (1 John 3:1-3).

The coming of Christ was not to condemn the world; the world was already condemned (Romans 5:18). The Son of God came into the world in human flesh that men and women of all nations might be saved. The word "*might*" does not express any uncertainty about the fact of their being saved. It expresses our Lord's purpose and design in coming. He came in order that the world might be saved. His person and work for sinners enabled God to be both just and Justifier of those who believe (1 Peter 3:18; Isaiah 45:20-25).

By Faith Alone

Fourth, our Lord teaches us that sinners obtain all the blessedness of eternal life in Christ by faith alone.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (VV. 18-21)

Obviously, faith in Christ does not give sinners life. Faith is the result of life given by God the Holy Spirit. And faith does not accomplish justification. Faith is the result of that justification Christ accomplished at Calvary. Yet, no one is saved without faith; and all who are saved are saved by faith alone, because salvation is

by grace (Romans 4:16). Three times our Lord repeats this glorious truth to Nicodemus. Twice he proclaims that “*whosoever believeth shall not perish.*” Once he says, “*He that believeth on the Son of God is not condemned.*”

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is salvation. He that has faith has life, and he that has it not has not life. Nothing is necessary to our complete salvation. Nothing will give us an interest in Christ except faith in him. You may fast and mourn for sin, and do many things that are right, and use religious ordinances, and give all your goods to feed the poor, and yet remain unpardoned, and lose your soul. But if you come to Christ as a guilty sinner, believing on him, eternal life is yours and you cannot be lost. Without faith in Christ, there is no salvation; but through faith in the Son of God, the vilest sinner is saved forever.

In this matter of salvation, faith stands alone, without works. If you would know whether you are justified by Christ, there is but one question to be asked. — “*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*” “*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*” (v.18).

For the believer there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1) because Christ was condemned in our stead (Isaiah 53:4-6). Those who believe not are condemned already. We all came into this world with the curse of sin upon us and were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Guilt and condemnation is increased by persistent unbelief. If any go to hell, it will be because they loved darkness rather than light. It will be because they refused to come to Christ, because they refused to believe on the Son of God (Proverbs 1:23-33; Matthew 11:21-30).

Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you faith in Christ! May he be gracious to you and give you the gift of life, for Christ’s sake.

The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent

“And 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)

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11). The Lord God himself declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and asks, “Why will ye die?” It is true, God will punish sin. He must do so. His law, his justice, and his righteousness demand it. But God’s law, justice, and righteousness can never find pleasure or satisfaction in the everlasting torments of the damned in hell. Indeed, if all the human race were to suffer the endless fires of hell, God’s righteous justice could never find pleasure and satisfaction. Man, who is but a finite creature, can never satisfy the claims of infinite justice. If that were possible, the death of Christ must be needless. If that were possible, the fires of hell must some day burn out. But infinite justice demands an infinite satisfaction. Hell must, therefore, be eternal! God’s justice can never be satisfied in the death of the wicked. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

But God does have pleasure in the death of the sinner’s substitute, Jesus Christ. Being the infinite God, our Lord Jesus Christ was able to satisfy, and has fully satisfied all the claims of infinite justice. Being the sinless man, he was able to stand in our room and bear the fulness of God’s wrath for us. In his incarnation, his birth, his life, and his death, the Lord God beholds Christ as the Substitute of his people, and says, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*” In the death of the God-man, God’s law, justice, and righteousness have pleasure and satisfaction. Therefore, there is no possibility of one soul for whom Christ died perishing in hell. The law has no claim against a believing sinner.

It is God’s pleasure, for Christ’s sake, to be merciful. He gives life to perishing sinners, and forgives all our sins for Christ’s sake. So, then, why will ye die? Turn now and seek the Lord, cry out for his mercy, and trust his Son. Only in Christ does God have any pleasure. Lay hold of God’s Beloved now. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall never die. Knowing the terror of the Lord, I seek to persuade obstinate, rebel sinners to be reconciled to God, to believe on the Son of God. That is our Lord’s intent in John 3:14-15.

The Old Testament history of the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses was used by our Savior to show poor, lost sinners the way of life. There is no better type and picture of our blessed Redeemer in all the Old Testament than the brazen serpent. There is no Old Testament type that gives us a clearer, more instructive picture of the way God saves sinners than the one set before us by our Savior himself in these two verses. — “*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.*” Our Lord Jesus here refers to an event that is recorded in Numbers 21.

“And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole,

and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.” (Numbers 21:4-9)

A Deadly Poison

The *first* thing I see in this picture is a humbling fact about our race. — We are all infected with the deadly poison of sin and under the judgment of God. This is a fact we prefer not to think about or acknowledge; but it is a fact nonetheless. The sooner we learn it, the better. We are all radically depraved, diseased at heart, corrupted with sin. This is the natural condition of all mankind. And until a man is made to know that from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there is no soundness in him, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, he will never seek mercy by the merits of Christ. This is clearly represented by the condition of the children of Israel in Numbers 21. We are told, “*The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much of Israel died*” (Numbers 21:6).

Can you imagine the horror and confusion of the camp of Israel? One day they were invaded by an army of fiery, flying snakes! The bite of the snakes was deadly. Their poison caused the body to burn with fever. There was pain throughout the whole body, as though fire was in the veins. Such is the destructive nature of sin. Those who were bitten of the serpents had death in their veins. And such is the deadly nature of sin.

“Sin, like a venomous disease,
Infects our vital blood;
The only balm is sovereign grace,
And the Physician God.

Our beauty and our strength are fled,
And we draw near to death;
But Christ, the Lord, recalls the dead,
With His almighty breath.

Madness, by nature, reigns within;
The passions burn and rage;
‘Til God’s own Son, with skill Divine,
The inward fire assuage.”

The picture that is set before us is a black one indeed. The Israelites were bitten, they burned with fever, then they died. And so it is with the fallen sons and daughters of Adam. We were all bitten by the old serpent and poisoned with sin in the garden.

Sin is not a social disease which comes by contact with other men. It is an inbred family disease. It comes to us by nature from our father Adam. — “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world... For by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners*” (Romans 5:12, 19). David cried, “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin died my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5). “*The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies*” (Psalm 58:3).

All men are in bondage to iniquity. All men are taken captive by Satan at his will. All the works of the flesh are evil. “*The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*” (Galatians 5:19-21). These are the thoughts of man’s heart and the works of his will by nature (Matthew 15:17-20; Mark 7:21-22).

By nature, man is such an evil creature and so corrupted by evil that everything he does is tainted with sin. Even the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. His very righteousnesses are filthy rags in the eyes of God. Mark it down, — man by nature is a sinner, utterly obnoxious before the holy Lord God.

Look over the catalogue of sin against God. We have all broken God's holy law in every point from our youth up. We break it continually. Even we who have been washed in the Savior's blood and regenerated by his grace constantly sin against him.

After the Israelites were bitten by the serpents, they began to burn within. — Sin does not instantly produce pain and misery. But give it a little time, and you will find that, like the old serpent himself, no matter how alluring and charming, sin is a painful poison to your soul. It will produce miseries more extreme than the fiery serpents caused Israel. — *“At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder”* (Proverbs 23:32). The young man casts his restraints to the wind, living riotously, but soon he will find that strong drink is a mocker. The young woman seeks pleasure, popularity, and promiscuity, but soon she will find that the way of the transgressor is hard. Others, because they are restrained by society, by parents, by religion, or by self-esteem, do not indulge in the vices of the day, but within them is a heart that burns with every obscene lust.

But the picture gets darker. — Those who were bitten, after much suffering, at last, died. And so it is written, *“Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.”* What a horrible death those people must have died! They cried, they convulsed, they begged, and they died. Soon, you, too, must die. You have the poison of the serpent in you. Soon, you must die. Soon, unless God intervenes, you will be in hell! Sometimes death comes without warning. Sometimes men are so hardened and calloused that they go to the graves without fear. But often, when they come to die, the wicked have such awakened senses that their souls are terrified. Like Esau, they seek a place of repentance with tears, but find it not. And after death — Hell! All the wicked go down into hell. There the burnings of conscience, the fires of the mind, and the torments of the soul are the everlasting results of sin.

These fiery serpents were the judgment of God upon Israel. Matthew Henry wrote, “God's wrath against us for sin is as those fiery serpents which God sent among the people, to punish them for their murmurings. The curses of the law are as fiery serpents, so are all the tokens of divine wrath.” Israel had sinned against the Lord; therefore, his judgment came upon them.

The sting of those fiery serpents was a fit representation of God's law when it is applied to the heart of the sinner, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:9). The law shows man the exceeding sinfulness of his sin in the light of God's holiness. The law threatens the sinner with Divine punishment. Hear what the law says: — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “The wages of sin is death.” “God will by no means clear the guilty.”* The law of God shuts us up to Christ alone. — *“What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”* When the law of God is applied to the heart of the sinner, then sin becomes a bitterness in his soul, a fire in his conscience, and a hell in his heart.

This is the work of God the Holy Spirit in conviction. The poor sinner is made to feel death in his members. His pride and self-righteousness wither. His naked sinfulness is laid in open view. Then, and only then will a sinner cry out for mercy. Until a person knows his sin, he will not seek mercy. Until he knows his need of Christ, he will not seek Christ.

It was a serpent that stung the Israelites. And it was that old serpent, the devil that poisoned our nature in the Adam-fall. All his temptations, assaults, and poisons are fiery. And when the dreadful effects of sin are felt in the awakened conscience, how they burn with terrors in the soul!

The Israelites who were bitten of the fiery serpents could do nothing to help themselves. Even so, those who are dead in sin can do nothing of themselves to change their condition. And when a man feels that his malady is beyond his own power, he will seek the help of Another.

What could the dying Israelite do to heal himself of those venomous bites? Nothing! What medicine could cure his wounds? None! There was no remedy within the power of man. The serpent's poison baffled all science, medicine, skill, and ability. It resisted every attempt of healing. That is sin. No prayers, no tears, no endeavors, no repentance can wash away sin. If the sinner is restored, it must be by the interposition and mercy of God alone.

God's Cure

The *second* thing set before us in the type of the brazen serpent is God's cure for our curse, God's remedy for our ruin. — The only means by which man can be redeemed from the malady of sin and the burning wrath of God's law is by the sacrifice of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is precisely what our Lord Jesus teaches us in John 3. This is the only way a man can be justified with God: — *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”* There are several things about the brazen serpent which set forth the substitutionary work of Christ in the place of sinners.

It was God himself who in his sovereign grace and free love provided the remedy. In providing the brazen serpent, God pointed Israel to his own Son, who in the fullness of time would come to make an end of sin. Many must have thought that the brazen serpent was a foolish remedy. After all, it was a serpent that caused the mischief. And many think that it is foolishness to talk of salvation by Christ. But Christ alone is God's appointed Substitute.

The brazen serpent was provided for the Israelites because of God's love and pity. And Jesus Christ was provided for the healing of perishing sinners because of God's love. — *“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.”*

The serpent was made of brass. As brass is a base and common metal, it properly represents our Lord's humiliation, who took upon himself the form of a servant. Brass is a bright and shining metal, and so it expresses the glory of Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. And brass is a durable metal, expressing the strength and power of Christ, who is *“able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.”* And it is representative of the immutability of Christ, who is *“the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”* But a serpent made of brass, shining brightly in the desert sun, was the most unlikely thing in the world to cure the people. A bright light shining in the eyes of one who has a malady in his head is likely to cause him to be taken with convulsions and seizures.

The brazen serpent had the form of a serpent; but there was no poison in it. Even so, our Lord Jesus Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was found in fashion as a man, yet, he is without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

And there was but one brazen serpent, by which the Israelites could be cured. Even so, there is but one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. There is one name given under heaven among men whereby ye must be saved — Jesus Christ the Lord.

As the brazen serpent had to be lifted up on a pole, so that all who were bitten could see; even so, the Lord Jesus Christ had to be lifted up on the cross, so that sinners everywhere might look to (believe on) him and live. Specifically, our Lord Jesus is talking about his own crucifixion in the place of chosen sinners, *“the Israel of God,”* when he says, *“even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”* The expression, *“Son of man,”* was, no

doubt, intended to remind us of Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah who must be cut off. The death of Jesus Christ was an absolute necessity.

It was necessary because of God's decrees and purposes. It was necessary because of God's promises and prophecies, because of the types and figures of the Old Testament, because of Christ's eternal agreements as our Surety in the covenant of grace. It was necessary because without it no sinner could ever be accepted of God. God's law had to be fulfilled. God's justice had to be satisfied. The only way a holy God can be merciful and gracious to sinners is if a suitable Substitute suffers and dies in their place. The very love and mercy of God for his people made the sacrifice of his Son necessary!

As the serpent was a cursed creature, the Lord Jesus Christ was made a curse for us when he hung upon the tree. — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”* — *“He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* — *“He, his own self, bare our sins in his own body, on the tree.”* — The brazen serpent Moses lifted up was a fiery serpent; and our Lord Jesus was made to endure the fiery wrath of God as our Substitute. His very soul was made to burn with the fires of hell for us, when he was made sin for us!

“Even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” — Remember, these speak of the Savior's crucifixion. As William Hendriksen wrote, “The lifting up of the Son of man is a ‘must.’ It is not ‘a’ remedy; it is the only possible remedy for sin, for in this way only can the demands of God's holiness and righteousness, and love, be met.”

Yet, there is more in this short passage. The Son of man must also be lifted up in his exaltation. It is only as the exalted Christ that he can be seen by all who are infected with sin. It is only the risen and exalted Savior who has the power to give lost, ruined, dead sinners eternal life. It is only the exalted Redeemer who is *“able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him.”*

And the Son of man must be lifted up in the preaching of the gospel. Preachers are like the pole to which the brazen serpent was fastened. We are useful only as long as we lift up and exalt the Son of God before the eyes of perishing men. It is the preacher's one and only business to preach Christ and him crucified. Christ alone can save us. Christ alone can justify, pardon, reconcile, and sanctify us.

Christ alone is our message. We can never heal the sinner's disease; but we can tell sinners who does heal all manner of disease. We cannot bring men to Christ; but we can point men to Christ.

Look to Christ

Here is the *third* thing I want you to see. — Every perishing sinner who believes on Christ shall be saved. In the gospel Christ is lifted up before all; but all are not saved. Yet, this I know, I have the Savior's own word for it, — *“Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* What were the Israelites told to do? They were not told to produce some healing medicine. They were not told to help one another. They were not told to fight the serpents. They were not told to make an offering to the serpent. They were not told to pray to the serpent. They were not told to obey Moses. They were not told to look at their wounds. They were told to Look. — Any who looked up to the serpent, no matter how grievous their wounds, no matter how weak their eyes, if they did but look, they were healed.

If you would be saved, you must look to Christ. Looking to Christ is an expression of faith in him. You desperately need to look to Christ. God himself commands you to look (1 John 3:23); and the Lord Jesus bids you look. — *“Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else.”* May God the Holy Spirit now enable us ever to look to Christ. Look to his glorious Person. Look to his

redeeming blood. Look to his unfailing love. Look to his saving power. Look to his fullness. Holy Spirit, ever cause me to look to him who alone saves poor sinners by his blood!

What is the result of this look? – Eternal life! Not only does the look bring healing to your soul, but you are given eternal life! — Look to Christ.

The Baptist, the Bride, and the Bridegroom

“After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between [some] of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all [men] come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 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. He must increase, but I [must] decrease. 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. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto him]. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. 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 3:22-36)

This is the last testimony of John the Baptist concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. That faithful man of God, John the Baptist, was the same at the end of his ministry as he was at the beginning: the same in his views of himself, the same in his views of Christ, and the same in his views of God’s salvation. Blessed is that church whose pastor is as steady, as bold, and as constant in proclaiming the saving majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as John the Baptist!

Much Water

The *first* thing that is obvious in this passage is the fact that it takes “*much water*” to perform the gospel ordinance of believer’s baptism. The Holy Spirit tells us plainly that “*John was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, because there was much water there*” (vv. 22-24). You cannot baptize anyone with a few sprinkles, or even a cup of water. It takes “*much water*” to perform the gospel ordinance of Believer’s Baptism.

John had not yet been arrested and murdered by Herod. He had not yet reached the end of his time on earth. So his work was not yet over. Here he is baptizing all who came to him, wishing to publicly confess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. Look at these three verses line by line, and learn what they teach.

If we compare what the Holy Spirit says in verse 22 with what he says in John 4:2, we see that that which is done by Christ’s servants, in his name and by his authority, is done by Christ himself. God’s servants are to be heard, received, and treated as the Lord Jesus himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2; Luke 10:16; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Verse 23 is one of the most definitive statements in Holy Scripture with regard to what men call “the mode of baptism.” — “*And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*” If baptism could be performed by sprinkling or pouring, “*much water*” would not be needed. Baptism is by immersion. The word “*baptized*” (both in the Greek and the English) means to dip, to immerse, or to plunge. The example of our Lord himself ought to settle all controversy in this regard. No unprejudiced mind can read the New Testament without seeing that baptism is immersion. The Lord Jesus was immersed (Matthew 3:16). Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). It

symbolizes the fulfillment of all righteousness by Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as our Substitute (Matthew 3:15). And it shows forth our hope of the resurrection (Romans 6:4). These things cannot be symbolically portrayed by sloshing a few drops of water on the head and calling the act baptism. They can only be portrayed by the burial of believing sinners in the watery grave, from which we arise to walk in the newness of life with our Savior. Baptism is immersion, a burial. Anything else that is called baptism is a sham.

Satan's Device

The *second* thing we have in this passage is a warning against one of Satan's favorite devices. The fiend of hell constantly seeks to divide God's people and to divide his servants.

“Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all *men* come to him.” (vv. 25-26)

Some of John's disciples and the Jewish religionists were involved in a heated debate about rites and ceremonies of purification. The Jews observed countless many purification ceremonies. Some scriptural, being required by God's law as pictures of his work of grace in saving his people, but most of these ceremonies were observed because of religious tradition, and had no basis at all in Holy Scripture.

These Jews seem to have thought that John was practicing a new purification ceremony. That would have been alright; but he refused to practice their ceremonies. In Matthew 3, when the Pharisees came to John for baptism, trying to tie his baptism to their traditions, he refused.

Read verse 26 carefully. When we read, “*And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him,*” the “*they*” are not John's disciples, but those same Jews who had been arguing with his disciples in verse 25. They are the same ones who were sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to question John in chapter one (John 1:19).

These same Jews came to John and told him that Jesus of Nazareth, the one to whom he bore witness, was baptizing and that all men now were coming to him. What do you suppose their motive was? They were trying to make John jealous and envious. They were trying to divide John's disciples and the disciples of Christ, as if they were serving two different causes.

That is one of Satan's favorite devices. He constantly tries to divide the church of God. He constantly strives to divide God's servants, to make one jealous and envious of another. Satan does everything he can to divide the people of God. We see one example of this after another in Scripture (Numbers 11:26-29; Philippians 1:14-18; Ephesians 3:8). All hell must hoot and roar with laughter when the fiend of hell succeeds in dividing brethren! May God the Holy Spirit protect us from this device of the devil and make us peace-makers (Ephesians 4:1-7). Strife and division are horribly evil, insidious, contagious, and injurious to the cause of the gospel. Let us do nothing to cause it and nothing to contribute to it!

A Faithful Servant

Third, John the Baptist is held up by the Spirit of God as a pattern and example of a truly faithful servant of God (vv. 27-35). Here is a man “*clothed with humility*” (1 Peter 5:5).

“John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 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. He must increase, but I *must* decrease." (vv. 27-30)

Here is one of the most important, most greatly used men in the history of the world, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. When men sought to honor him, he turned the honor away from himself to another. In verse 27 John asserts that any honor a man has, any usefulness in the kingdom of God, any place of service is that which God gives him. Blessed is that servant who knows this and acquiesces in the sovereign will of his God (1 Corinthians 4:7; 12:11, 18; Ephesians 4:7). John turned the attention of these men away from himself to that other man who came into the world as Jehovah's Servant, Jesus of Nazareth.

In verse 28 John declares himself to be nothing, just a voice, a voice sent to proclaim the coming of the Christ. This was not a sham, pretentious show of humility, but genuine humility. Like Paul after him, he says, "*By the grace of God I am what I am*" (1 Corinthians 15:10). We see in John the Baptist a very different spirit from that displayed by these Jewish religionists. He genuinely sought no honor or praise, no recognition or applause from men. Rather than receive it, he turned it to another Servant, to promote another Servant of God. That is a faithful servant. True, that other Servant was the Lord Jesus Christ; but the principle is the same.

Beware of any preacher who courts praise and recognition, who seeks light to shine upon himself, who calls attention to himself, and does nothing to promote the ministries of other men. As John Trapp observed, "Self-love makes men unreasonable, and ever teacheth them to turn the glass to see themselves bigger, and others lesser, than they are." Ezekiel uplifted the name of Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14). Paul promoted Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). And Peter praised Paul, though he had been publicly reproved by him at Antioch (2 Peter 3:15; Galatians 2:11). Faithful men promote one another, but never themselves.

God's servants, faithful gospel preachers are friends of Christ, the Bridegroom. Like the best man at a wedding, faithful preachers rejoice to see Christ come to take his bride in his arms. They do not desire to be seen, but for him to be seen with his bride (v. 29). They just hold the ring (the everlasting gospel of peace).

The bride is the church, God's elect of every age and nation, the people of God. They belong to the Bridegroom (given to him by the Father, redeemed by his blood, and brought to him by his Spirit). The friend of the Bridegroom is not jealous and envious. He is truly a friend and loves the Bridegroom, he rejoices in the happiness of the Bridegroom, and his joy is fulfilled when the Bridegroom is glorified. The servant of Christ is occupied with Christ and his glory, — nothing else!

Since the first time I read verse 30, with any sense of its meaning, since the day that it was first brought home to my heart, I have been praying that the Lord God might daily make this the ambition of my heart. — "*He must increase, but I must decrease!*" This is the will and purpose of God. Let it be my will and purpose, too. — "*He must increase, but I must decrease!*" He must increase in his greatness; but I must decrease. We can never think too highly of Christ. We can never extol him too much, love him excessively, or be overly devoted to him.

Then, in verses 31-35, John begins to increase Christ and decrease himself.

"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. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure *unto him*. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." (vv. 31-35)

Christ came from heaven and is above all. I am of the earth and speak as one of the earth (v. 31). The Lord Jesus is the perfect revelation of God; but men refuse to hear him (v. 32). Yet, all who receive his testimony, all who believe him set to their seal that God is true (v. 33).

Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, we seal the truth to our own hearts. But, this 33rd verse might be translated, "He that received his testimony is already sealed, because God is true." Chosen, redeemed sinners come to Christ in faith, we believe him, when Christ has sealed us by his Spirit (Revelation 7:1-3). That translation is verified by Scripture (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:12-14; 4:30; Jude 1:1).

Christ is the only man to whom the Spirit is given without measure (v. 34). He is the full Revelation of God. He is the full Truth. All the fulness of the Triune God dwells in him without measure (Colossians 2:9). How vast the difference between the servants of God and the Servant of God!

God the Father has given all things to Christ, as our Mediator, because of his love for him (v. 35; John 10:16-18). — *"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."* You might ask, "What all does that include?" It includes all things pertaining to the universe, all things pertaining to life, all things pertaining to the new heavens and new earth, all things pertaining to the church, and if there is anything else, all things pertaining to that, too! God has laid help for our souls upon One that is mighty (Psalm 89:19).

Your Responsibility

Fourth, in verse 36 John the Baptist gives us the final point of the last sermon he preached before his execution. Having declared the greatness and glory of Christ, the Lamb of God, the sinner's Substitute, he asserts that your eternal destiny is your own responsibility. — *"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."*

Here is the nearness and presentness of God's salvation. John the Baptist declares, *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life!"* Pardon, peace, eternal life, and a complete title to Heaven are the immediate possession of every sinner who believes on the Son of God. This salvation in all its fulness is the immediate possession of every believer.

What a glorious assertion! There are no works to be done, no conditions to be fulfilled, no price to be paid, no years of probation to be passed before a sinner can be accepted with God. Believe on Christ, and you are at once forgiven. By Christ, all that believe are justified from all things.

If faith in Christ brings with it present and immediate privileges, to remain unbelieving is to be in a state of tremendous peril. If heaven is so near to the believer, hell is just as near to those who believe not! — *"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

How sure is that soul of blessedness who has the Son! How sure the everlasting misery of hell's torments are to those who have not the Son of God! The wrath of God, not taken away by Christ, *"abideth on"* them who believe not the Son of God!

"Come humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve;
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve.

'T'll go to Jesus, though my sins
Like mountains round me close;
I know his courts, I'll enter in,

Whatever may oppose.

Prostrate I'll lie before his throne,
And there my guilt confess;
I'll tell him I'm a wretch undone
Without his sovereign grace.

I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives!

Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know,
I must forever die.

But if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (Delightful thought!) —
As sinner never died!”

Having said all that, read verse 36 again, paying close attention to the verb tenses. — “*He that believeth on the Son hath (present tense) everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life (future tense); but the wrath of God abideth on him.*” Why, do you suppose, did the Holy Spirit inspire John to use different verb tenses? Would it not have meant the same thing if he had used either the present tense or the future in both places? No, the meaning would have been completely different.

When John declares, “*He that believeth on the Son hath (present tense) everlasting life,*” he is telling us that wherever faith in Christ is found life is already present. Faith in Christ does not produce eternal life. Eternal life produces faith in Christ. When he asserts, “*he that believeth not the Son shall not see life,*” while placing all responsibility upon the guilty soul that chooses not to believe, he shuts the poor sinner up to God’s sovereign grace, declaring plainly that unless God the Holy Spirit gives you life, you will not and cannot believe on the Son of God. At the same time, John assures us that if we find ourselves believing on Christ, we are born of God. Faith in Christ is the evidence that it is so (1 John 5:1, 10-13).

Five Things Necessary for the Conversion of a Sinner

“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 Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. 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. 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? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am [he].” (John 4:1-26)

What does it take to save a sinner? How is conversion accomplished? I want to answer that question by showing you how our Lord Jesus brought the Samaritan woman to himself, giving her life and faith in himself by his omnipotent mercy. In this portion of Holy Scripture God the Holy Spirit shows us that which is taught throughout the Book of God: — Conversion is the work of God alone. Here are five things that are necessary for the conversion of a sinner.

Path Crossed

First, no sinner will ever come to Christ until Christ first comes to the sinner. No sinner will come to Christ until the Lord Jesus Christ himself crosses the sinner’s path.

“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 Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.” (vv. 1-2)

The Son of God left Judea. What a solemn word this is from God! Our Lord was in the midst of the Pharisees. He preached in their streets. He who is God’s salvation walked the streets of Judea and preached the gospel. But the Pharisees despised him and his gospel. They would not receive the Word of God. They

preferred religion to righteousness. Therefore, the Lord Jesus left them. He left them in the darkness of their imaginary light. He left them to go to hell in the delusion of their self-righteousness. He left them to themselves!

Hear God's Word and be warned. — If you trifle with Christ and the gospel of God's grace in him, you court the wrath and judgment of God! If God leaves you to yourself, you are as sure for hell as if you were already there. I pray that God will not leave you to yourself.

If you go to hell, you will have no one to blame but yourself. It will be your own work, your own doing, your own fault (Proverbs 1:23-31). But do not be so foolish as to imagine that your unbelief will alter, or in any way affect the purpose of God. It won't (Romans 3:3-4).

God's purpose does not depend upon the consent of man's will, or upon the work of any man. You may not trust Christ. You may never come to him. But someone will. There is an elect remnant who must and shall be saved. At the appointed time of love, Christ will come to the sinner chosen by grace and redeemed by his precious blood. At the appointed time of love the Good Shepherd comes seeking his lost sheep.

“And he must needs go through Samaria. 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.” (vv. 4-6)

This looks like a chance meeting, a lucky break; but it was nothing of the kind. In God's eternal purpose, that place had been fixed before the world began. That parcel of ground was bought and that well was dug by Jacob because he desired it. But, more importantly, that parcel of ground was bought and that well was dug so that Christ our Savior might come there to meet and save a lost, ruined sinner. The Son of God came there seeking one of those the Father gave to him before the world began. The woman did not come to the well seeking Christ; but he came to the well seeking her (Isaiah 65:1).

Divine providence arranged for the needy sinner and the mighty Savior to be at the well at the same time. She came to the well at noon (the sixth hour of the day), in the heat of the day, when it was most likely that no one else would be there, because she was a woman with a name and a reputation that made her the object of great scorn. Yet, she came at this hour, because this was the hour fixed by God to save her.

Notice this, too: — The Lord Jesus arranged to be alone with the object of his mercy, love, and grace. — *He sent his disciples away to buy* (to buy, not to beg¹) *bread* (v. 8). I am reminded of what we read in the book of Hosea concerning God's method of grace. — “*Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her*” (Hosea 2:14).

“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.” (vv. 7-9)

Do not fail to observe that, as Robert Hawker pointed out, that “The conversation which took place at the well, between Jesus and this woman began with our Lord. Yes! All the overtures of grace come first *from* the Lord (1 John 4:19).”

Created Interest

¹ “Our Savior lived not upon alms.” – *John Trapp*

This Samaritan woman would never have come to Christ had he not first crossed her path and come to her. *Second*, once he crossed her path, the Lord created an interest in her (vv. 10-14). — He asked her for a drink of water, because he was thirsty, yes; but the thirst he had come to quench was his thirst for her soul. His request was designed to get her interest and attention.

The woman answered his request with a rude retort. Essentially, she said, “You’re a Jew. You wouldn’t have anything to do with me, if you didn’t need me. How dare you ask me to draw water for you! I know what you think of me.” But our Lord is long suffering toward his elect, not willing that any of them should perish. So he ignored her insult and pursued her heart. Look at verse 10.

“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.” (v. 10)

There is much more in this verse than I can deal with now; but I want you to see the obvious things.

1. **Salvation is the gift of God** (Romans 6:23). — Who can measure the gifts of God? They are innumerable! Yet, in one great gift, God gives all. Christ is the gift of God, the unspeakable gift of God. Christ is salvation. Christ is eternal life (Luke 2:30; John 17:3).
2. **You will never be saved, you will never come to Christ, until you are made to know the gift of God.** Henry Mahan wrote...

“This is the root of man’s whole problem. The gift of God is salvation; it is eternal life (1 John 5:11). God is the Giver; all we do is receive. Man does not know the gift, and he does not know Christ, the Giver! Neither does he know his need for mercy. ‘If you knew these things, you would ask of me.’ Asking proceeds from knowing. Before we ask, God has to deal with us in conviction and revelation. Notice Christ deals with her on the basis of who, not what; it is not doctrine, any more than doing, that saves. It is the person — Jesus Christ!”

3. **Salvation is to be had for the asking** (John 7:37-38; Luke 11:9-13). — *“Thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”* — How close at hand salvation is! *“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, [even] in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”* (Romans 10:8-9). Christ is willing to pour out this living water of grace, salvation, and eternal life to sinners in overflowing superabundance! — *“Ask and ye shall receive.”*
4. **All men by nature are totally ignorant of all things spiritual, until we are taught of God the Holy Spirit** (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

In verses 11 and 12, this poor woman did what all unregenerate people do when they talk, or try to talk about spiritual things. She showed her total ignorance. She had no idea who she was talking to, or what she was talking about. Like Nicodemus in John 3:4, she was just talking.

“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? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” (vv. 11-12)

In verses 13-14 the Lord Jesus declares the vanity of all earthly things.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (vv. 13-14)

These words are written by the finger of God over all the wells of this world: — “*Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.*” The thirst that is in you, the thirst of your soul is too deep to be quenched by the waters of this world. Have you not found it to be so? But that person who is born of God, who receives the water of life, who has the grace of God, the Spirit of God, the Christ of God, and the light and life of God in his soul shall never thirst again (1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:9-10).

No sinner will ever come to Christ until Christ comes to the chosen, redeemed sinner and creates a thirst in his soul for something more than can be found in this world.

Sin Exposed

Third, no sinner will come to Christ until he exposes to that sinner his own sin. Before a sinner comes to Christ for mercy, he must be made to know and acknowledge his sin before God. Because he intended to be gracious to her, the Lord Jesus made this woman know that she was utterly naked before him.

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.” (vv. 15-18)

He laid bare what she thought she could keep hidden. This always makes sinners uncomfortable. We love darkness rather than light. We will not come to the light, lest our deeds be reprov'd. And when the light falls on us, we immediately take refuge and try to turn the light away from ourselves. That is exactly what happened next.

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” (vv. 19-20)

The Samaritan woman immediately changed her tone and the subject. She began to speak respectfully, and started talking religion. She wanted to get away from the subject of her immoral, lascivious, perverse behavior. Her conscience was pricked; and she tried to soothe her conscience by talking about her religion. She tried to break the barb off the Master's arrow with the shield of religious controversy. Men love to talk about religion in general terms, just like this salty old girl. Here she is, a woman with less respectability than a prostitute, a woman who shack'd up with one man, then another, without the least compunction, defending her father's religion!

But the Lord Jesus would not be led into her trap. He was far more concerned for her soul than he was in proving a point. So he did what only he can do. He destroyed her refuge of lies.

Refuges Destroyed

Fourth, no sinner will come to Christ and find refuge in him, until he destroys every false refuge, every refuge of lies, in which the sinner attempts to hide from God. Every rebel sinner has a refuge of lies, a religious refuge he has built, some kind of fortress around his soul, a refuge in which, like Adam in the garden, he is hiding from God. That refuge must be destroyed.

Notice how the Lord Jesus destroyed this woman's refuge. He did not shake his finger in her face and say, "You Arminian Samaritans are all going to hell." He simply told her the truth; and the truth, penetrating her heart, destroyed her refuge.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth." (vv. 21-24)

God the Holy Spirit gives us his commentary on our Savior's words in Philippians 3:1-3.

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed *is* not grievous, but for you *it is* safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

God is seeking sinners to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. If we would worship God, we must worship him in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in the spirit of sincerity, in the spirit of faith, and in the truth of the gospel (Isaiah 28:14-22; Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:16-22).

Reveal Himself

Fifth, the Lord Jesus Christ must make himself known to the sinner, before the sinner will come to him.

"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*." (vv. 25-26)

Slowly, but surely, the Word of God had done its work (Romans 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). This woman was driven from her refuge of lies into the arms of the Son of God. As soon as she expressed a desire for the Christ of God, in whom alone sinners can worship God, he said, "*I am!*" — "*I am he.*" — That is salvation. That is what it takes to bring sinners to the Savior — the revelation of Christ (Zechariah 12:10).

Once Christ is revealed to you and in you, that is enough. Nothing more is needed. The needy sinner and the sovereign Savior met face to face, and all was settled forever (Isaiah 45:20-25; Matthew 11:28-30).

The Blessed Constraint of Grace

“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 Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.” (John 4:1-9)

In these opening verses of John 4 there are several things that demand our attention. Here are seven lessons the Holy Spirit would have us lay to heart.

1. The very first thing we see in this chapter is the fact that **our Lord Jesus Christ, the man who lived and died upon this earth to save us from our sins, is Himself the omniscient God.**

The primary purpose of John’s gospel is to show us that the man Christ Jesus is God, God manifest in the flesh. Therefore, he misses no opportunity to display our Savior’s Godhood. There is no hint of anyone having informed Him of what the Pharisees were saying and doing, but “*the Lord knew.*” There was no need for anyone to inform him of anything, because He is the God before whom nothing is hidden, before whom darkness is light.

That One who humbled Himself, who took the infinite stoop of taking into union with Himself our humanity, who came down here to dwell upon the earth in human flesh as Jehovah’s Servant, is here called “*the Lord*” because he is the Lord! This man, whom the Pharisees contemptuously regarded as the Nazarene carpenter, was none other than the Christ of God, in whom “*dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily!*”

He who brings in everlasting righteousness as a man for men must Himself be the everlasting God. He who obtains eternal redemption for sinners by the shedding of His blood as a man must Himself be the eternal God.

2. **The religious world is now, always has been, and, until time is no more, always shall be set in opposition to the God of glory, His Son, and the Gospel of His grace.**

Mainstream religion has always been opposed to the worship of our God. I know that many talk of days gone by when “most people believed the things we do, when most people believed the gospel of the grace of God.” I defy anyone to show me such a time.

The fact is, from the days of Cain and Abel, through the days of Enoch, Noah, and Job, while Abraham walked in the earth with God, from the days of Moses, throughout the years of Old Testament history, the vast majority of the people in this world despised the worship of God, even those who professed to worship Him and claimed to be His people. — All men are idolaters by nature. — All men are will worshippers by nature. — All men vainly attempt to mix their works with God’s grace to find acceptance with God.

There is a way which seems right to all men. All men walk in that way, defend that way, and oppose anything and anyone who speaks against that way; but the ends thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

This is exactly what we see in these Pharisees here in John 4. “*The Pharisees heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John.*” Even at this early date in our Lord’s public ministry, the Pharisees were obviously plotting to get rid of Him.

They were jealous of His following. It was bad enough that they had to put up with John; but here was a man, obviously in league with John, who was even more influential than John the Baptist. The Pharisees were threatened by the Master’s influence. They feared losing their position, power, and prestige as religious leaders.

The Lord Jesus was looked upon by them as a man from a lower social class, (He was from Nazareth of Galilee!) from which they thought no prophet could come (John 7:52). They just knew that nothing good could come out of Nazareth.

Primarily, they despised His doctrine. Our Lord openly exposed, reproved, and rebuked their hypocrisy, their tradition, their customs, their doctrine, and their empty religious ritualism.

3. Here is a third lesson. **Believer’s baptism is an ordinance of Divine worship, for which we are responsible, but only an ordinance of worship. – Baptism has nothing to do with salvation.**

“*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)*” (vv. 1-2). — Notice the order here. First, disciples were made. Then, they were baptized, not the other way around. You will search the Scriptures in vain to find anyone being baptized as an infant, or being baptized to obtain grace, or being baptized before conversion. Baptism is the believer’s public confession of faith in Christ, by which we identify ourselves with and make an avowed, public commitment to Christ, His people, and His Gospel (Romans 6:3-6).

“*Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.*” Commenting on that statement, C. H. Spurgeon wisely observed, “Our Savior did not Himself baptize His followers. Now, if baptism depended upon the character or the office of the baptizer, Jesus would certainly have done it; but to show us that the person baptizing does not impart any grace to the person baptized, our Lord baptized not, but left that work to his disciples.”

4. Here is another lesson, a lesson which is evident to almost everyone, except those who make it evident. **Religion without Christ makes people even more proud, bigoted, and mean spirited than we are by nature.**

“*The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans*” (v. 9). — The Jews looked upon the Samaritans as a lower class, an inferior race, and despised them. The Jews had the Word and oracles of God; but they would not think of sharing the knowledge and worship of God with the Samaritans. The Jews, particularly the Pharisees, were a heartless people, totally indifferent to the glory of God and the souls of men. They were only concerned for themselves, their appearance before men, and their religion. The proudest, meanest, most dishonest people I have ever known have been religious people, — not believers, religious people!

5. **Light despised will be withdrawn and turned into darkness.**

What sad, sad words are those found in verse three: – “*He left Judea!*” Our Lord refused to cast his pearls before swine. “*He left Judea!*” What a warning those words give: — Light despised will be withdrawn and turned into darkness (John 12:35-46, 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2).

I urge all to believe the Gospel. I call upon sinners everywhere, in God’s name, as God’s ambassador to their souls, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, I assure you that God’s will, God’s purpose, God’s grace, and God’s glory do not depend upon what men do, not in the least.

6. **The purpose of God is not and cannot be altered by man’s unbelief.**

Far from it! If you go to hell, it will be your fault. There is no question about that. God would save you, if you would obey His voice, if you would trust his Son. If you go to hell, you will, as He says, “*eat the fruit of your own way and be filled with your own devices!*” But your unbelief, your rebellion, your despising the counsel of God will not alter the purpose of God, but only fulfil it (Romans 3:3-4).

God cast off Israel because Israel cast off God. Yet, in their rejection of God’s Gospel, God’s kingdom, and God’s Son, the Jews, by bringing judgment upon themselves, became the very instruments by which grace was carried to the Gentiles, that the fulness of the Gentiles might be brought in by the grace of God (Romans 11:1, 25-26, 29, 33-36). Blessed be God, it is yet true, and forever shall be – “*The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his*” (2 Timothy 2:19).

Though the Jews despised Him, though the Pharisees sought to destroy Him, though he left Judea...

7. It is written in verse 4, “*He must needs go through Samaria,*” because **there are some people in this world who must and shall be saved by the almighty grace and according to the sovereign, unalterable purpose of our great and glorious God.**

Read the text as it stands. “*He must.*” It does not say He might, He wants to, He hopes to, He will if, or He is going to try. The text says, “*He must!*” That means – “*He must needs go through Samaria!*”

This was not a thing He might or might not do, but a thing He must do. Why? Because there was a chosen, blood bought sinner there, for whom “*the time of love*” had come. In fact, there were a bunch of chosen, blood bought sinners¹ down in Samaria, for whom “*the time of love*” had now come; and they must now be saved by His almighty grace, every one of them!

Though obliged to do nothing, yet, as our Surety, the Son of God obliged himself to perform specific deeds of mercy, love and grace for His elect, that he might bring us to glory. He obliged Himself to save His own (John 10:16-18). That means that the salvation of chosen sinners is a thing as certain and as much a matter of necessity with God our Savior, as His own truth and faithfulness.

“*He must needs go through Samaria*” to save His chosen, to seek and save His lost sheep. I know, many say, “He had to go through Samaria, because that was the nearest way to get from Judea to Galilee.” They are exactly right. The closest route from Judea to Galilee was to go through Samaria. But it was God who, in His wise and adorable providence, made it the closest way, because God in His providence put his

¹ Yes, I do understand that Christ had not yet shed His blood at Calvary. I also understand that He is the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). These Samaritans were, like all God’s elect, redeemed in the purpose of God from eternity, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, “*who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world!*”

elect there. As C.H. Spurgeon put it, “Providence directed man to build Samaria directly in the road, and grace constrained the Savior to move in that direction.”

When the time of love comes for the objects of His mercy, love, and grace, the Lord Jesus will come to His chosen in almighty, omnipotent, irresistible, saving power. We bless and praise Him for the fact that His people shall be willing in the day of His power. When God says “*must*,” it must be! There is no standing against God’s omnipotent “*must*.” Let me give you four reasons for these words, “*He must needs go through Samaria*.”

A Divine Purpose

“*He must needs go through Samaria*,” because of a divine purpose. God purposed it before the world began, and so it came to pass. We believe and rejoice in the grand, glorious, God honoring doctrine of divine predestination. It is a doctrine plainly taught in Holy Scripture, and a doctrine full of comfort for the believer’s heart (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11).

“Keep silence all created things,
And wait your Maker’s nod:
My soul stands trembling while she sings
The honors of her God

Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown,
Hang on His firm decree:
He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be.

Chained to His throne a volume lies,
With all the fates of men,
With every angel’s form and size,
Drawn by the eternal pen.

His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine:
Each opening leaf and every stroke
Fulfils some bright design.”

— *Isaac Watts*

A Divine Promise

“*He must needs go through Samaria*,” because of a divine promise. Divine predestination moves according to the promise God Himself made in eternity to give eternal life to His elect. Yes, the Bible does teach the doctrine of election. We are told plainly that God promised eternal life to chosen sinners before the world began (Titus 1:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10).

“Father, ’twas Thy love that knew us
Earth’s foundations long before:
That same love to Jesus drew us
By its sweet, constraining power,
And will keep us safely now and ever more.”

— *J. G. Deck*

Divine predestination arranged all things from eternity, in the purpose of God, according to the divine promise of eternal life to chosen sinners in Christ. This promise of eternal life to God's elect was made in...

A Divine Pact.

"He must needs go through Samaria," because of a divine pact. We delight to trace everything back to that sovereign pact and blessed covenant of grace made on our behalf with Christ, our Surety, before the world began. There is nothing more delightful to my soul than covenant love (2 Samuel 23:5). It was in that covenant that our Savior put Himself in bondage, put Himself under obligation to save His people (John 10:16). *"He must needs go through Samaria,"* because some of those other sheep were there, whom He must bring into his fold. Once more, *"he must needs go through Samaria,"* because of...

A Divine Purchase.

The Lord Jesus came here to fetch this woman, and the others in the city whom He had chosen, because He bought them with His blood. How I rejoice to tell sinners everywhere that the cross of Christ shall never be discovered a miscarriage.

The Lord Jesus must go through Samaria, because there were those in Samaria whom the Father had given Him from eternity to save, for whom He voluntarily assumed all responsibility, whom He purchased with His own precious blood, whom He must save.

If you are one of God's elect, there is a needs be for Christ to save you; and save you He will. Perhaps you are yet in your sins. You may have been fleeing from Him for years; but when He comes, He will overtake you. He will conquer you. He will have you. I am sent of God to tell you, He is already on His way, and He will have you. Blessed be God, there are some people in this world whom He must save, from whom He will not take "no" for an answer.

When the Son of God comes to save, He will come to you like He did Zacchaeus of old (Luke 19:5, 9-10). *"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation"* (Isaiah 25:9).

This is the blessed constraint of God's grace. His people must be saved because He has purposed to save them. Therefore we read in John 4:4 that our Lord Jesus Christ *"must needs go through Samaria."*

Two Stories of Grace

“And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” (John 4:4-7)

I am constantly aware of my utter insufficiency for the work of the ministry, for the work of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to eternity bound sinners. What great wisdom and grace is needed to minister to the souls of men, wisdom and grace that only God the Holy Spirit can give!

We all have different needs, different backgrounds, different experiences, and different circumstances. Yet, we all need the same things spiritually. We all need grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation. In John chapters three and four we see two people who could not have been more different, who were saved by the marvelous, free grace of God in Christ. These two great sinners and Christ our great Savior are set before us in these two chapters of Inspiration in a most remarkable way.

“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. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:1-3)

“And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” (John 4:4-7)

It is always a mistake to interpret any portion of Scripture without considering the context in which it is found. In fact, it is impossible to interpret the Word of God correctly, if we do not interpret it contextually. Not only did the Holy Spirit inspire the words of Holy Scripture, He also inspired and fixed the order in which we are given things in the Inspired Volume. It is no accident that the two stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are set before us in the same context. Together they show us that none are beyond the reach of God’s saving grace in Christ.

Nicodemus shows us that none can rise too high, and the Samaritan woman shows us that none can sink too low to be saved by the grace of God. At the end of these two stories of grace, we have this great declaration in John 4:42 – *“This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world!”*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Savior there is. He is the Savior of Jews and Gentiles, men and women out of every nation, tongue, and position in the world (Acts 4:12). All who are saved are saved in the same way. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:1-10), through the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinners Substitute (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), by the revelation of Christ in us (2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Galatians 1:15-16).

Yet, we all experience grace in a distinct, personal way. No two sinners experience grace in exactly the same way. This is clearly set before us in these two people. Let’s look at the way our Lord Jesus dealt with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, and see what we can learn from their experience of grace.

A Great Separation

First, we see that there is a great separation between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Both were chosen of God and saved by His grace. We see this fact with regard to the Samaritan woman in the immediate context. Once the Lord revealed Himself to her, she immediately left her water pots and said to the men of the city, — “*Come, see a man, that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?*” (v. 29). Many believed because of her word.

Nicodemus was one of those disciples who in John 19 came to bury the Lord Jesus. He was not converted immediately upon hearing the Gospel. But he was converted. The Master said to him, — “*Ye must be born again;*” and he was, at the appointed hour, born again by God’s omnipotent mercy.

Here are two sinners, chosen, redeemed, and called by grace; but it would be impossible to imagine two people more distinct and separate from one another. The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is obvious to the most casual reader.

- Nicodemus was a recognized, important, sophisticated ruler of the Jews, a man of name, rank, and reputation. — She was an unnamed, insignificant nobody.
- Nicodemus was a proud Jew. — She was a despised Samaritan. Samaritans were a mongrel people, a people who feared the Lord and worshipped their own gods, mixing the worship of God with the worship of idols.
- Nicodemus was a wealthy, well-educated scholar. — The woman was poor and uneducated.
- Nicodemus was a man. — The Samaritan was a woman.
- Nicodemus was a man known and respected for his great morality. — She was an adulteress.
- Nicodemus came to the Savior by night to protect his reputation. — This woman came to Jacob’s well at noon to avoid other people, because she had no reputation to protect.
- Nicodemus sought the Lord Jesus. — The Lord Jesus came to Samaria seeking this woman.
- The Samaritan woman was converted immediately upon hearing the message of Christ. — Nicodemus was converted a good while after he first heard the Gospel from the Savior’s lips.

It would be impossible to find two people more diverse, more unlike, or more separate from one another socially. Yet, these two people, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, are now seated together around the throne of the Lamb in Glory. Only the grace of God can do that. Only in Christ are social dividers demolished; and in Christ they are demolished (Colossians 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:12-22). Grace reconciles sinners to God; and grace reconciles sinners to one another.

A Great Sameness

Second, though much separated and distinguished Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman from each other, still there was a great sameness about them.

As I look into the faces of the immortal souls sitting before me every time I stand to preach the Gospel, I see many things which, naturally, distinguish us from one another. Yet, there is a great sameness about us all. Those who are without Christ may look at the person sitting beside them, in front of them, behind them, or across the room from them, and think — “I am not like him, (or her),” but they really are exactly the same in many ways. What did Nicodemus and this Samaritan woman have in common? I am sure there was much more than this, but here are four things they had in common, four things we all have in common.

1. **Self-righteousness!** — They both thought they were right spiritually, right before God. Without question, neither of them had peace in their hearts. Their souls were troubled. Their consciences were

uneasy. But they had both made a refuge of lies, in which they hid themselves in self-righteousness¹. Both had a religious refuge, which had to be destroyed before they would flee to Christ for refuge. That fact is true concerning all who do not know God (Isaiah 28:14-20).

2. **Spiritual blindness!** — Neither Nicodemus nor the Samaritan woman had even the slightest spiritual understanding or discernment. Neither could see the kingdom of heaven (1 Corinthians 2:14).
3. **Rebellion!** — Both the proud Pharisee and the Samaritan adulteress were lost rebels. When he was confronted with things he could neither understand nor refute, Nicodemus poked fun at the Master's doctrine. He ridiculed what he could not comprehend (John 3:4). When the Lord Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman about living water, because she could not understand his words, she did the same thing (John 4:11-12).

The fact is, this woman and Nicodemus, like all men and women by nature, like all who are yet without Christ, were lost rebels. As it is written, — *“All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way”* (Isaiah 53:6). — *“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Romans 3:12).

If you are lost, it is because you are an obstinate, stubborn, implacable rebel. If you go to hell, it will be because you have broken God's law, despised God's Gospel, rejected God's counsel, laughed at God's reproof, refused to bow to God's Son, and hated God in the very core of your being.

4. **Emptiness!** — Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman tried hard, just like we all did, to cover it up; but they had an emptiness in their souls, which could not be filled with the water pots of their religions, or their accomplishments, or their lusts.

Augustine said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

“All my life long I had panted
For a draught from some clear spring,
That I hoped would quench the burning
Of the thirst I felt within.

Feeding on the husks around me,
Till my strength was almost gone,
Longed my soul for something better,
Only still to hunger on.

Poor was I, and sought for riches,
Something that would satisfy,
But the dust I gathered round me
Only mocked my soul's sad cry!”

A Great Savior!

¹ Self-righteousness flourishes in human flesh, just as fully among adulterers and adulteresses as among Pharisees and Sadducees, just as well in the hearts of criminals as in the hearts of cardinals. – Just as Nicodemus argued theology with the Master, defending himself and his religion, so did this adulteress!

Oh, what a great Savior our Lord Jesus Christ is! Let me show you what he did for these two great sinners. The Lord Jesus did not deal with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman the same way. Yet, in a very real sense He did. This is always what Christ does when He comes to save a sinner.

He destroyed the refuge of lies in which they hid themselves. He exposed their rebellion, unbelief, and sin. He made Himself known to them. He crossed them at their point of rebellion. And He conquered them by his grace.

“Blessed *is the man whom* thou choosest, and causest to approach *unto thee, that* he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple.” (Psalms 65:4)

“Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.” (Psalms 110:3)

Christ the Well of Salvation

“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 4:6)

Christ is a River flowing from the throne of God, the River of the Water of Life (Revelation 22:1). — “*There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High*” (Psalm 46:4). — “*Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water*” (Psalm 65:9).

The Lord Jesus is “*The Fountain of Life*” and “*The Fountain of Israel*” (Psalm 36:9; 68:26). — He is the “*Fountain of Living Waters*” (Jeremiah 17:13), from whom we receive the Spirit of God, Who springs up in our souls as a Well of Living Water unto everlasting life (John 7:37-39).

And he is “*a Fountain opened*” to us for sin and uncleanness by God the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 12:10). How often in Scripture our blessed Savior is spoken of as “*Water*.” He is a River of Water and a Fountain of Water. And in John 4:6 we see the Lord Jesus meeting a sinner at a well of water. — “*Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.*”

The Message

There’s got to be something special about that. Everything written in the Book of God is designed to teach us something about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the message of this blessed Book. All the laws given to Israel, every aspect of worship under the ceremonial law, all the prophecies, all the events in the history of Israel, everything in the Inspired Volume, by the design of infallible inspiration, points us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is of immense importance that we never read the Scriptures casually, merely for entertainment, or to fulfil our daily disciplines. We should always seek the spiritual message in every passage we read. I do not mean that we should invent a spiritual message and read it into a text; but we should always seek the spiritual message of the text, understanding that the message of every text is Jesus Christ and him crucified (Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 5:39; Acts 10:43).

If the whole Volume of Inspiration is written to reveal the person and work of our beloved Redeemer, as it clearly is, that means, as A. W. Pink observed, that, “There is a profound significance to everything in Scripture, even the seemingly unimportant details.”

With these things in mind, I call your attention to the place where our Lord Jesus met the adulterous Samaritan woman, the place at which grace was bestowed upon her, the place from which she found that living water, which was made to be in her soul “*a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*” — “*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.*”

Significance of Places

All that transpired between Christ and this poor sinner took place at the well called, Jacob’s well. Frequently, it is impossible to understand the spiritual, Gospel meaning of those events recorded in the Scriptures until we know the place where those events occurred and understand the significance of it. Let me show you some examples of what I mean.

1. The children of Israel were in Egypt when the Lord delivered them by blood and by power. — Egypt symbolizes the world of darkness and the bondage we were in, under the tyranny of Satan and the terror of the law, when God saved us by his grace.
2. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. — That wilderness aptly portrays the emptiness, barrenness, and desolation of religion without Christ.
3. When our Savior began His public ministry, He went up into the mountain, a place of elevation, to give us the Sermon on the Mount. — That mountain displayed the elevation of His throne and the heavenly nature and source of His doctrine.
4. When He gave out the parables of His kingdom, He went down to the seaside. — In the Scriptures, the sea represents the Gentile world¹. Thus, He taught that His Gospel, His kingdom, and his salvation were for God's elect throughout all the world, both Jew and Gentile.
5. In the parable of the good Samaritan our Savior portrays the poor sinners He came to seek and save as a certain man, who went down from Jerusalem (the place of blessedness and peace, the city of God) to Jericho (the place of curse). — That is a picture of man's fall.
6. He taught us the same thing in the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal son left his father's house, ran away into a far country, and brought himself to abject poverty and utter ruin.

I could give many more examples; but these will suffice to demonstrate the need for observing and understanding the meaning of the place where things happen in the Scriptures. Everything written in the Book of God is written by Divine inspiration and is written for a purpose; and that purpose is to teach us the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus came to Jacob's well, choosing that spot to be the place where He would make Himself known to the adulterous Samaritan woman, because He is Himself the Well of Salvation. Let's see if that is not the teaching of Holy Scripture. In Isaiah 12:3 we read, "*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*"

Christ is the Well of Salvation; and there are many wells of salvation in Him from which we draw the Water of Life. It is a great mistake to limit the accomplishment of our salvation to one thing. Christ is our Salvation; and He accomplished and accomplishes salvation for us by many mighty deeds of grace. There are many wells of salvation in Him from which we draw the Water of Life. — The Well of His Divinity (John 1:1-3) — The Well of His Humanity (John 1:14) — The Well of His Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:6) — The Well of His Atonement (Romans 5:1-11) — The Well of His Resurrection (Philippians 3:10) — The Well of His Exaltation (Philippians 2:8-11) — The Well of His Intercession (1 John 2:1-2) — The Well of His Indwelling (Colossians 1:27) — The Well of His Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) — The Well of His Presentation (Jude 24-25).

In the Old Testament Scriptures the wells around which so many important events took place were typical of our Lord Jesus. We will look at seven wells that stand out as highly significant places in Scripture. These seven physical, historic wells, as meaningful as they were historically, are insignificant and meaningless to us, until we see how they represent our great Savior, Who is the Well from which we must draw the waters of salvation and eternal life by faith.

1. **The Well of Meeting** (Genesis 16:6-7, 13-14)

¹ Isaiah 17:12-13; Ezekiel 26:3; Daniel 7:2; Revelation 17:5

(Genesis 16:6-7) “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, by the fountain in the way to Shur.”

(Genesis 16:13-14) “And she called the name of the LORD that 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 Beerlahairoi; behold, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.”

“*Beerlahairoi*” means “the well of him that liveth and seeth me.” This is the first mention of a well in the Word of God. It is not insignificant. The poor outcast was found at the well. God saw Hagar, met her, and supplied all her need at the well. The only place where God and sinners can ever meet is Christ. The only place at which God can or will look upon sinners in favor is Christ. The only source from which the needs of our souls can be supplied is Christ.

The children of Israel named that place where the Lord spoke to Moses and promised to give them water “*Beer*” (Well of Life). When they were “*discouraged because of the way*” (Numbers 21:4), they returned to the well and sang unto it (Numbers 21:14-18).

(Numbers 21:14-18) “Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. 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: The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by *the direction of* the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness *they went* to Mattanah.”

The fact that they sang (not by the well, but) unto the well makes it obvious that they were taught to look upon the wells God gave them as being representative of Christ and life in Him by the Spirit (John 7:37-39).

2. **The Well of Revelation** (Genesis 21:14-19)

Here again we see Hagar. This time, she has been expelled from the patriarch’s home with her son, Ishmael.

(Genesis 21:14-19) “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 bowshot: 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*. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.”

This well was the place of revelation to Hagar. Here is a poor, outcast sinner, perishing in a desolate wilderness. She is helplessly weeping before the Lord, not really praying, just weeping. Broken-hearted, desperate, helpless, she waited to die, watching her only child die. But God intervened. — “*And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.*” What a great blessing of grace that was (Proverbs 20:12; 1 John 5:20). If we would be saved, we must know God. But God cannot be known by us, except He reveal Himself. And the triune God reveals Himself to sinners in Christ alone (John 1:18).

Look at another well in this same chapter.

3. **The Well of A Covenant** (Genesis 21:27-31)

(Genesis 21:27-31) “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 Beersheba [*Well of Oath – Well of Promise*]; because there they swore both of them.”

The patriarchs cherished their wells. They often fought wars to defend and keep them, because without the well they could not survive. That is a good picture of the believer’s desperate need of Christ. We must have Him! Here, in Genesis 21:27-31, we are told about a covenant sealed by an oath at a well. It was a covenant for good. Does that remind you of anything? It should remind us of that better, everlasting covenant of grace, of which Christ is the Surety (Hebrews 7:20-22).

4. **A Well of Prayer** (Genesis 24:10-12)

In Genesis 24 we find Abraham’s servant, Eliezer, seeking a bride for Isaac. As he went about his business, he stopped by a well to pray, seeking God’s direction, God’s will, God’s mercy.

(Genesis 24:10-12) “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, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.”

Christ, the Well of Salvation, is that One in whom, through whom, and by whom we have access to God. Christ is for us the Well of Prayer, the Place of Prayer (Hebrews 4:15-16).

5. **The Well of Rest** (Genesis 29:1-3)

(Genesis 29:1-3) “Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. And he looked, and behold 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: and a great stone *was* upon the well’s mouth. And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well’s mouth in his place.”

This well was found, not in the wilderness, but in the field. Here in green pastures the Good Shepherd makes His sheep lay down and rest and gives His sheep water from the well of His grace, assuring us that all is well with our souls. — “*Say ye to the righteous, that [it shall be] well [with him]: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings*” (Isaiah 3:10). Christ is our Well of Rest. He is our Rest. He is our well of satisfaction. — “*O that one would give me to drink of the water of the Well of Bethlehem*” (2 Samuel 23:15).

(Isaiah 40:1-2) “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

6. **The Well of Refuge** (Exodus 2:15-17)

(Exodus 2:15-17) “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.”

Thank God, there is One to whom sinners can flee for refuge. Our Refuge is that One to whom this well pointed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Isaiah 32:1-2) “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

To this well alone we must come, like the daughters of Jethro. The hireling shepherds, those preachers who hate the Gospel of the free and sovereign grace of God in Christ, drive sinners away from the well of refuge to a refuge of lies. Yet, even in this dark, dark day, God has His servants who, like Moses, stand up to help thirsting souls, watering the Lord’s flock.

7. **Jacob’s Well!**

(John 4:6) “Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well: *and* it was about the sixth hour.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is Jacob’s Savior. Jacob was a divinely chosen sinner (Romans 9:11-13). He was a blood-bought, redeemed sinner (Psalm 77:15; Isaiah 43:1), a sinner conquered and saved by God’s free grace (Genesis 32:24). Jacob was a sinner who drank from Christ, the Well of Salvation, the Water of Life. Do you drink from this Well?

Wearied with the Journey

“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 4:6)

Are you weary? Weary with the trials and temptations that vex your soul? Weary with the warfare raging in your heart? Weary with sin? Are you weary with labor and toil? Weary with the heavy burden you carry? Weary with this world? Are you weary with the journey, tired, worn out, beat down, exhausted? If you are the words of John 4:6 should be distinctly meaningful to you. — “*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.*”

What a picture we have before us! Here is our great Savior, the Lord of Glory, the Son of God, that One Who came to seek and save that which was lost, that One Who lived to do His Father’s will, “*wearied with His journey.*” When we are weary and heavy laden, we are hereby encouraged to look to Him. The Lord Jesus Christ was, as a man, as our Savior, wearied with His journey, as He sat upon Jacob’s well.

What does this mean? Why is this fact recorded? What does the Spirit of God intend for us to learn from the fact that our Savior was tired, weary, beat down, exhausted from the toil and burden of His journey? Obviously, this fact is not recorded to reveal some weakness in our Savior’s character. But this event in the life of our Redeemer was and is intended to teach us that our dear Savior is a real man, a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

A Real Man

First, we see here how truly human the Lord Jesus Christ is. The Apostle John, more than any other of the gospel writers, wrote his gospel narrative to show the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is John, above all others, who shows us that Jesus the man is God the Son, the second person of the holy Trinity (John 1:1-3; 1 John 5:7).

Yet, it is John who seems to go out of his way to show us the real humanity of Christ. Many today, who claim to believe in Christ, deny His true and absolute deity. But in John’s day many who claimed to believe in Christ denied His real humanity. And multitudes today lose much benefit to their souls, because they fail to grasp the reality of our Savior’s humanity.

He who is our Redeemer must be both God and man in one glorious person. None but a perfect man could suffer the wrath and judgment of God for man’s sin as our Substitute. None but God could satisfy the infinite wrath and justice of God to put away man’s sin. That God-man, our Substitute, is Jesus Christ, Who died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

“*God was manifest in the flesh.*” — “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*” — We repeat those statements of Scripture with ease. But I am sure we have not yet begun to grasp the reality and fulness of our Savior’s manhood. We seem to have more difficulty grasping the real humanity of Christ than we do in grasping the glorious godhead of our Savior. I know that I do.

When I read in the Bible that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of all things, I have no problem at all in saying, “Amen, my Savior is my God.” Yet, I must confess to my shame that, when I read that He was tempted of the devil, that He was troubled in his soul, and that He was weary as a man, my first inclination is to try to explain away the reality of His temptations, troubles, and weariness. In doing so, I dishonor Him whom most I long to honor in all things. The humanity of Christ is every bit as necessary to our salvation as His deity, and every bit as comforting.

The fact that our Savior sat upon Jacob's well as a man wearied with His journey is intended to minister comfort to His people, and is intended to encourage sinners to trust Him. Our Savior's divinity did not, in any way or to any degree, diminish His capacity for suffering as a man.

You might ask, "Why is it that He who raised the dead, multiplied the loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine for the benefit of multitudes did not perform a miracle for Himself?" That is a good question.

When He was hungry after forty days of fasting, and Satan tempted Him to turn the stones into bread, He certainly could have done so with the greatest of ease. Without question, the water in Jacob's well would have gushed out of the ground to quench the thirst of the Son of God and relieve His weariness had He simply willed it. But our Lord Jesus Christ came not to be ministered unto (even by creation), but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.

If He would be our Savior, if He would stand to His own bond as our Surety, if He would put away sin as our Substitute, it was absolutely necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ endure all the consequences of sin. — *"It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto his brethren."* From the moment He became flesh, the curse of the fall began to fall upon the Lord of Life and Glory.

Though He knew no sin, did no sin, and was altogether holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, our blessed Savior experienced all the frailties and infirmities of fallen humanity, which are the result of sin. He experienced all the calamities to which human life is exposed in this world. Our Redeemer was pricked with all the thorns and thistles the earth is made to bring forth to man. He was, at last, brought to the dust of death by his Father, just as He said He must be in Psalm 22:15. These were the conditions to which the Redeemer subjected Himself in the days of His flesh, when He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Our Savior's whole life was a life of weariness, sorrows, and affliction. He was exposed to all the common miseries of humanity. He knew all the needs you can know in this world of woe, all the sorrows and all the pains. The man Christ Jesus felt in Himself every groan He heard from suffering men; and, as the prophet spoke of Him, He *"Himself bare our sicknesses, and carried our sorrows"* (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17). Therefore, we are told by God Holy Spirit that our Savior, *"being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well."*

This weariness was a real weariness. The word *"wearied"* tells us that our Savior was tired; but wearied is a much stronger word than "tired." This word, *"wearied,"* means tired, sick, worn out, exhausted, beat down, burdened. Our Savior was *"wearied!"* He was weary with fatigue, from His journey. He was weary with care for the souls of men. He was weary with the burden of His heart, the burden He carried throughout the days of His flesh, the fact that soon He must be made sin to put away sin. This weariness was real, more real than any of us can imagine.

Yet, this was a voluntary weariness. This was a part of the curse he had come to remove. I repeat, the consequences of Adam's fall, the consequences of sin, seized upon Him as a man, from the moment that He came forth from the womb, saying, *"Lo! I come to do thy will, O my God"* (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17; Hebrews 2:10, 17-18; 4:15-16; 7:24-26).

Child of God, when weariness seems to overwhelm you, look up to Christ. What an example He has given us. Though wearied more than any man, His weariness did not prevent Him from continuing in His journey. Weariness did not prevent Him from pushing forward in His work. Weariness did not keep Him from doing his Father's will. Weariness did not keep Him from serving the needs of a poor, eternity bound sinner.

Was he wearied with His journey through this world as Jehovah's Servant? He truly was. Yet, He turned not back. So let me be found faithful to the end, though often wearied in the journey. Was He wearied with His journey? He truly was. So let me never grumble about mine. Was He wearied with His journey, having no place to rest His head? He truly was. So let me not repine if I find the world treating me as an outcast. Was He wearied with His journey, though rich, yet for my sake condescending to be poor, though the Lord of Life and Glory, yet "*a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;*" subjecting Himself to hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and affliction, tempted, and buffeted, and despised; yea, "*a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and the outcast of the people*"? He truly was. Spirit of God, grant me grace in every trying circumstance of life, as oft as I am weary of the journey appointed me in this world, to behold my blessed Lord "*Jesus being wearied with His journey, (as) He sat thus on the well!*"

Wearied with Sin

However, I have no doubt that this text was written by the finger of God to teach us more. It was given to give us something more than a proof of our Savior's humanity. It was given to give us more than an example to follow. Great as these things are, there is more. — Our Lord Jesus Christ is a Savior wearied by man's sin and unbelief.

We may be indifferent to sin. Unbelief may seem to be a little, insignificant thing to us. But sin and unbelief are not matters of insignificance and indifference to God. Our text shows us a picture of the Son of God "*wearied with His journey,*" His journey through this world as the Savior of the world.

The Son of God is wearied with our sin (Isaiah 43:24). He declares, — "*Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled Me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities.*" He says, — "*Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*" (Amos 2:13).

The Lord of Glory is thoroughly wearied with man's religion, too (Isaiah 1:10-15). Religious formality, ceremonialism, and ritualism are as nauseating to the holy Lord God as fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. In fact, those are the very things to which He compares all Christless, faithless, religious activity in the first chapter of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:10-15; 57:11; Psalm 78:36).

Sinners who persist in rebellion and unbelief, who stop their ears against the Gospel and shut their eyes against the light, shoving God out of their way as they run madly on to hell, weary Him by resisting the Holy Ghost. Yes, I am fully aware that the grace of God is irresistible (Psalms 65:4; 110:3). How I thank God for that fact! Were it not for irresistible grace, none of us would ever be saved. Yet, the Word of God holds sinners accountable. God holds men responsible for resisting His Spirit. — "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye!*" — "*And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man*" (Acts 7:51; Genesis 6:3).

Perhaps you are thinking, "If grace is irresistible, if all God's elect are sure to be saved, if man's will, or decision, or choice has nothing to do with his salvation, how can you say that men resist the Holy Ghost?" Understand the Scriptures: Man's will, man's choice, man's decision has absolutely nothing to do with salvation; but has everything to do with damnation! Just as Israel provoked the Lord for forty years in the wilderness, those who hear, but refuse to believe the Gospel of Christ provoke His wrath. Just as the Israelites perished in the wilderness because of unbelief, because the Word preached to them did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in Christ, just as Israel could not enter into the land of promise, because of unbelief, those who believe not, who refuse the counsel of God shall perish under the wrath of God, because of their own, willful, deliberate, chosen, decided unbelief! It is man's will that will carry him to hell at last, unless God himself intervenes (Proverbs 29:1; 1:23-31). "*He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*" (Proverbs 29:1). Therefore the Lord God says...

“Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. 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: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” (Proverbs 1:23-31)

A Weary Sinner

This wearied Savior came to this specific place, at this specific time, to save a weary sinner. It is this same Christ, the wearied Savior, Who calls sinners to come to Him in the most gracious, tender words imaginable. He says, — *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28).

Yet, no sinner will ever, of his own accord, come to Christ. Therefore, at the appointed time of love, the Son of God must needs go to the place where He will meet the object of His mercy, love, and grace to fetch His chosen to Himself.

Here is the Christ of God waiting to save a weary sinner, who had wearied Him with her sin! I do not suggest that this woman was spiritually weary with her sin; but weary she was. No one ever lived such a life as she lived who did not soon become weary with it.

Look away, in your mind’s eye, to that little spot outside Sychar in Samaria. What do you see in the picture drawn here by the Spirit of God? — *“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.”*

Let me tell you what I see in this scene. As I behold the Son of God, sitting thus on Jacob’s well. I see the Lord of Glory waiting to be gracious (Isaiah 30:18). His prophet declares, — *“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”* (Isaiah 30:18). Do you not see him? There He is waiting for a sinner, a specific sinner, waiting to save, waiting to bless!

I see here a God willing to save. How can anyone doubt Christ’s willingness to save? How can any question the fact that He who is God, the God against whom we have sinned from our youth up, against whom we sin with every breath we draw, is that God of whom the prophet says, *“He delighteth in mercy”*? See the Son of God sitting yonder wearied, yet waiting on Jacob’s well, because He is a God willing to save! He was watching for her. He had come there to save her. And save her he did. Yes, He was wearied; but as soon as the woman for whom He had come was present, His weariness seemed to vanish. He was enlivened by the very appearance of the object of His everlasting love.

A Satisfied Redeemer

Let me show you one more thing. — That which refreshed and revived our wearied Savior that day in Samaria, and that which now satisfies the travail of His soul is the salvation of sinners. When the disciples came back from town, the Lord Jesus was still sitting at the well. But, He was no longer thirsty. He seems not to have been weary at all. In fact, He appears to have been refreshed, revived and completely satisfied (John 4:26-32).

“Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*. 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? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him. In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.”

The Master had said to her, “*Give Me to drink.*” And she did. She did not dip her water pot into the well; but she gave Him the water He was seeking. As soon as the Lord Jesus made Himself known to her, she believed Him. She was what He had come to get; and He was satisfied. It is written, “*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:11).

“Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

If You Knew...

(John 4:1-10) “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 Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. 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.”

Our Lord Jesus might have said the same thing to this poor, Samaritan adulteress that He did to the rich young ruler – “*One thing thou lackest.*” Like the rich young ruler, this Samaritan woman lacked just one thing. Just one thing kept her from being a believer.

She was an object of electing love. God chose her as such from eternity. She was one of those whose names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world began. She was predestined to eternal life in Christ. Yet, she was lost. She was still a rebel. She was still an unbeliever. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to lay down His life for this woman, to put away her sin by the sacrifice of Himself as her Substitute. Yet, she did not trust Him.

There was one thing missing. She knew her Bible history. She knew her religious dogma. She knew what her church believed, and defended her denomination with a vengeance. She knew that Messiah was coming and that salvation could be found only in Him. She knew that Christ alone was the Savior of men.

Yet, she was still lost, lost because of one thing. What one thing was missing? — “*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*” (v. 10). The one thing which kept this poor sinner out of the kingdom of God, the one thing which keeps sinners out of the kingdom of God, was just this: – She did not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you knew, if only you knew the Lord Jesus Christ, you would trust Him. It is your ignorance of Christ that holds you in unbelief. Did not our Lord Himself say, “*If you knew Me, you would know My Father also*” (John 8:19; 14:7)? He wept over Jerusalem, saying, “*If thou hadst known*” (Luke 19:42). In fact, the Holy Spirit tells us that if the rulers of this world had just known who He was, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:8).

It is a man’s spiritual ignorance, the blindness of his soul that holds him still in unbelief, just as it did this Samaritan adulteress. But, blessed be God, when the Light of the World shone upon her, when the Sun of Righteousness arose within her, she saw and she believed. So it is my prayer, every time I preach the Gospel, that God the Holy Spirit will be pleased, by the almighty power of His invincible grace, to make the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shine in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners, and give them life and faith in Him.

Saving Knowledge

First, the Lord Jesus spoke to this woman about saving knowledge. He said, *“If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink...”* Doctrinal knowledge is not salvation. Be sure you understand that. — Doctrinal knowledge is not salvation. Grace is not gained by learning. Righteousness is not the reward of study. Salvation is not the successor of research. You can have all the right doctrine and miss Christ altogether.

Calvinism is no more beneficial to a man’s soul than Arminianism. I have no more interest in converting men from Arminianism to Calvinism, than I do in converting men from Hinduism to Catholicism. Salvation is not found in a religious system. Salvation is not in a system of works, a system of rituals, or a system of doctrine. Salvation is in a Person. Salvation is in Christ. In fact, salvation is a Person. Christ is Salvation! Is that not what the Book says? – (John 17:3; Luke 2:29-30; Exodus 15:1-2; 2 Samuel 22:1-3; Psalms 27:1; Psalms 35:3).

Salvation is not what you know, but Who you know. — *“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). What you know, or don’t know is really irrelevant. But that does not mean that a person can be saved without knowing Christ, without knowing the Gospel. Knowledge is as essential to faith in Christ as oxygen is to breathing. But understand this: – It is not what we know that saves us, but Who.

Our Lord told this Samaritan woman that she would be saved, she would be a believer, if she knew, if she knew the gift of God, if she knew Who He was. Is that what you see in the text? — *“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).

Gospel knowledge is essential to saving faith. Let men rattle on all they want about people being saved who do not know God, do not know Christ, and do not know the Gospel. It just is not so. It makes just as much sense to talk about Mormons and Russellites being saved as it does to talk about Arminians, will-worshippers, and work mongers being saved. Those who deny the Gospel do not know God. Those who despise the character of God do not love the Lord. Those who trample the blood of Christ under their feet as a useless waste are not born of God. Those who despise the Spirit of grace do not know the God of grace. Gospel knowledge is essential to saving faith. It is impossible to trust an unknown Savior (Romans 10:13-17). It is utterly impossible for anyone to call upon and worship the Lord if they do not trust Him. It is utterly impossible for anyone to trust Christ until they know Him. It is utterly impossible for anyone to know Christ without a preacher. It is utterly impossible for anyone to preach Christ, unless he is sent of God. That is precisely what God the Holy Spirit declares in Romans 10:13-17.

Two Essential Things

Faith in Christ is not a leap in the dark. Faith is walking in the light. There is no saving faith without saving knowledge. I could say many things about this saving knowledge. Indeed, much needs to be said. But our text speaks of two things specifically, which this woman had to know, if she would be saved, two things which no one knows by nature, but two things which we must know if we are to be saved. Without the knowledge of these two things, there is no faith in Christ. Without the knowledge of these two things, there is no salvation.

1st, All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, all who are taught of God and born of God know *“the gift of God.”* The Savior says, *“If thou knewest THE gift of God.”* What is He talking about? What is the gift of God? God tells us in His Word. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ (Romans 6:23), salvation by faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), the unspeakable gift of His dear Son (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The gift of God is Christ Himself and the salvation that God gives to sinners in Him, as a matter of pure, free, undeserved, sovereign grace. Most all religious people, almost all who claim to be worshippers of Christ,

like Simon Magus, vainly imagine that the gift of God can be purchased with money, or human effort, or human merit of some kind (Acts 8:20). All believers know and rejoice in the fact that salvation is the gift of God: — Not a Present, but a Gift! — Not an Offer, but a Gift! — Not a Proposition, but a Gift!

Saving faith involves knowledge, knowing the gift of God, and it involves knowing Him by whom the gift comes. There is no saving faith in Christ without a saving knowledge of Christ. No one is saved who does not know who Christ is and what He has done. — *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”* (John 17:3).

When our Lord Jesus put the question to the man who had been blind, *“Dost thou believe on the Son of God? he answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?”* Then, the Savior made Himself known unto him. *“Jesus said unto him, Thou hast seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.”* His eyes were opened to see Him, and his ears now heard Him, and both being true in a spiritual sense, he immediately expressed his faith in Him, saying, *“Lord, I believe,”* and as a proof and evidence of his faith in Christ, he *“worshipped Him”* (John 9:35-38).

Before there can be any faith in Christ as our Savior, there must be some knowledge of Him and of our need of Him as such. As John Gill put it...

“A man must be made sensible of the sinfulness of his nature, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, of the just demerit of it, and of the miserable state and condition it has brought him into, out of which none but Christ the Savior can deliver him.”

We then call upon Christ, crying for mercy, as the apostles in distress did, saying, *“Lord, save us, we perish”* (Matthew 8:25). But no man will ever call upon Christ to save him, until he is acquainted with his own impotence, until he sees that he cannot save himself, that he cannot contribute anything to his salvation, and that no one else can help him but Christ.

No sinner will ever fall out to Christ, until he is made to see that if ever he is saved, it must be by the grace of God alone, through the blood and righteousness of Christ alone, and not by the work of his own hands or the power of his own will.

There can be no faith in Christ apart from the knowledge of the fulness and ability of Christ as the sinners' Substitute, Surety, and Savior. We cannot trust Him until we see Him as the Christ of God, full of grace and truth. We will never trust Christ, until we are made to know that He is a Savior suitable to our souls needs. We cannot trust Him as our Redeemer, until He makes us to know something about the redemption He accomplished for sinners at Calvary. We cannot trust Christ alone for righteousness, until we are convinced of the righteousness of God which is in Him, which He established. We cannot trust Him for the forgiveness of sin, until we are convinced by the Spirit of God that He has put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. We cannot trust the Son of God as our Savior, until we see Him at the right hand of the Majesty on High, with saving power in His hands. No sinner will ever trust Christ alone as his Savior, until he sees that all salvation is in Him (1 Corinthians 1:30).

It is absurd to talk about saving faith without saving knowledge. Knowledge and faith are joined together as inseparable companions, and as expressing the same thing. It is written, *“We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.”* We are firmly persuaded of it (1 John 4:16). The strongest acts of faith in God's saints are sometimes expressed by words of knowledge. — *“I know that my Redeemer liveth... I know in whom I have believed”* (Job 19:25; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Divine Revelation

This knowledge comes to sinners only by divine revelation. Saving knowledge is something more than a notion, an idea, or even a fact. It is a personal, experimental knowledge of the living God, not an academic knowledge, not a secondhand knowledge, not a textbook knowledge, but a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. — *“I know whom I have believed!”* It is knowledge that is conveyed to and born in the hearts of God’s elect by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit in the new birth through the preaching of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:23-25). It is the spiritual knowledge of God given faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16).

Faith’s Request

Next, our Lord Jesus speaks about a request. Look at John 4:10 again. — *“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.”*

That which is sure to follow the knowledge of Christ, the knowledge of God’s free grace gift of salvation and eternal life in Him is faith, faith expressed in a request. If you only knew the gift of God, if only you knew my Savior, you would ask of Him. You would cry out to Him like the publican, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* You would pray like the leper, *“If thou wilt, thou canst make me whole!”* You would pray like Bartimaeus, *“That I might receive my sight!”* You would plead with Him like the thief on the cross, *“Remember me!”*

Christ’s Promise

Now, look at our text one more time, and see what it is that the Lord Jesus Christ promises to poor, needy sinners who ask of Him. — *“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.”* *“Ask, and ye shall receive!”* — *“Believe, and you shall live!”* — *“Look, and you shall be saved!”* Ask of Christ, and he will give you living water!

Do you wonder why the Lord here refers to His great salvation as *“living water?”* — Because water is the gift of God. Water is absolutely essential to life. Water meets a universal need. Water comes down from heaven. Water cleanses and refreshes. Water is free. And water is something no one ever gets tired of having. Christ is the Water of Life; and the salvation He gives is *“living water”* springing up in our souls.

Two Views of Christ

“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.” — Here are two sweet, precious, instructive views of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He held before the Samaritan woman, by which He graciously and effectually endeared Himself to her. Let us ever behold our Savior in these two aspects of His character as our God-man Mediator: (1.) all that He is in himself, and (2.) the fact that He is the gift of God.

These two things give poor, needy sinners both a reason to trust our Lord Jesus Christ and a Divine warrant for faith in Him. Ignorance of these two great things is the cause of much misery in those poor souls tortured with the guilt of sin, and the cause of much discomfort in believing sinners. Ignorance of these two, sweet revelations of grace greatly hinders our enjoyment of our interest in and union with the Lord Jesus Christ. *“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.”* — May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to prove these words of our Savior to ourselves.

Christ’s Person and Work

I ask you to consider who and what the Lord Jesus is in Himself. Consider His magnificent Person and His mediatorial work as the God-man, our Savior. In all that He is, in all that He performed, in all that He accomplished, and in all that He obtained as the God-man, He acted as the Surety of His elect. And by virtue of all the fulness that is treasured up in Him, we have all things. None of the virtue, merit, and power of His work or being as the God-man is for Himself, but for us. He does not and cannot need it. We do.

“So that,” as Robert Hawker wrote, “a poor sinner is as much suited to Jesus for Him to give out of his fulness, as Jesus is suited for a poor sinner to supply his emptiness.”

If we thus know Him and come to Him, we find that He is as eager and anxious to receive every poor, needy sinner and to give out of His fulness, as that poor, needy sinner is to come and take!

The Gift of God

Our Lord Jesus declares that He is, in all His mediatorial work and being, “*the Gift of God.*” Here we are given a warrant from God to come to Christ. God himself gives sinners command to believe on His Son (1 John 3:23). That is the warrant of faith. That is the sinner’s right and authority to trust Christ.

Do you know who Christ is and what He has done for sinners? If you know that Jesus Christ the Savior is the Gift of God, make use of Him as such. Use Him for every need of your poor soul. Christ is the only Sacrament there is. We receive grace only in and by Him. He is the only Way sinners can come to God and find acceptance with Him.

May God the Holy Spirit enable us ever to keep in view that Christ is the Gift of God and that God is honored by us when we honor His dear Son, by believing “*the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*”

The thirst of our souls cannot be quenched from any pool that depends upon dry or wet seasons; but only from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who gives living water and is Himself that everlasting living spring of water in our souls, springing up into everlasting life.

If the one thing which prevents sinners from being saved is their ignorance of Christ, let us make it our life’s business to make Him known. Go, tell your neighbors, your families, your friends, and your enemies, if they will hear you, who Christ is and what He has done for you. Tell it everywhere! Tell it to everybody!

“Whence hast Thou that Living Water?”

“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. 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 4:10-11)

What a blessed gift – *“Living Water!”* What a wondrous Giver – *The Lord Jesus Christ!* What delightful terms – *“Ask, and ye shall receive!”* The text before us was inspired and written here in the Book of God specifically to teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ has all grace, salvation, and eternal life in himself, that he has it for sinners, to give away freely, and that he gives it to every sinner who asks him for it.

This is the doctrine of the gospel, the message of the Bible. If you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, if you ask him to give you this living water, he will fill you with his grace and put his Spirit in you, *“a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.”*

I fear that far too much preaching is designed to impress men, not to convert them. May God save us from such! When our Lord Jesus spoke to eternity bound sinners, he had no interest in impressing his hearers with his oratorical skills. His object was to convince immortal souls of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Therefore, he spoke to the hearts of those who heard his voice in plain, simple terms.

May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher as we seek to answer the question this poor sinner put to the Son of God. – *“Whence hast thou that living water?”*

The Lord Jesus told this woman plainly that if she had known the gift of God and who he is, she would have asked of him and he would have given her living water. I fully realize that she did not know the full implication of what he had said; but she obviously understood that he was talking about something different from the waters that gathered in Jacob’s well. He was talking about water bubbling with life from a constantly renewed and renewing source, an artesian well of water. Therefore, she asked a very reasonable question. — She said, *“Whence hast thou that living water?”*

Living Water and God’s Salvation

Our Lord Jesus here uses the words *“Living Water”* to describe his gift of grace, salvation, and eternal life by the Holy Spirit. — In fact, this is the way God’s salvation is (Isaiah 12:3; Zechariah 13:1; John 7:37-38; Revelation 21:6; 22:17). Here, our Lord uses the words *“living water”* to describe the whole work and gift of God’s grace in salvation. This comparison of his salvation to *“living water”* is very suggestive. *“Water”* is a most appropriate word to describe God’s salvation, the gift of God in Christ.

Water is a gift of God. It is something no man can create. If we have water, God must give it. So it is with God’s salvation (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8).

Water is vital. This is not an optional, add on luxury. Water is indispensable to life. No one can survive without it. Without it we die. Again, the comparison is obvious. Without God’s grace, God’s salvation, God’s Spirit, we must forever perish under the wrath of God.

Water meets a universal need. Water is not the requirement of some men, but of all men. All the sons and daughters of Adam stand upon equal footing here. It matters not how rich or poor we are, how learned or illiterate, we must have water. It matters not whether we are male or female, black or white, water is something we all must have. It meets the needs of all men alike. So it is with God’s salvation. All who are without Christ

are lost. All who have Christ are saved. All who are without Christ are without grace and without hope. All who have Christ have life.

Water comes down from heaven. It is not of the earth and earthly, but from heaven and heavenly. Again, this is true of God's grace and salvation in Christ. — *"Salvation is of the Lord!"*

God's salvation is well described by the word "*water*," because water, like salvation, is a gift that has multiple benefits. It cleanses the filthy. It cools the fevered brow. It quenches the thirsty. It refreshes the weary. And it satisfies the soul of a man.

Water is something of which we never tire. You may get tired of city water, with all its human corruptions. You may tire of yuppie, plastic-bottled water, with its stale, stagnancy. But I defy anyone to walk by a cool, mountain spring, gushing out of a hillside, on a hot summer day, without stopping for a drink. So, too, those who drink of this water will never tire of it. Chosen sinners never tire of electing love. Redeemed sinners never tire of blood atonement. Forgiven sinners never tire of Divine pardon. Saved sinners never tire of saving grace.

Water is sovereignly distributed. In some places, it is abundant. In other places, it is scarce. In some places, it comes seasonally. In other places, it seems to fall freely at all seasons. So it is with God's salvation. In some places, God sends the dew of heaven occasionally. In some places, he opens the windows of heaven and rains grace every day! In some places, he sends not so much as a cloud.

Only Christ

This water, this "*living water*" comes to sinners only from Christ. If you would have this water, you must get it from him. Let me make just two statements in this regard.

1st — Grace, salvation, and eternal life are in Christ, only in Christ, and in Christ in infinite abundance (John 1:16-17; Colossians 1:19; 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31). Salvation is not in the church, but in Christ. Grace is not found in religious "sacraments," but in Christ. God's salvation is not found in religious ritualism, moral reformation, an emotional decision, or the religious sensationalism of this apostate, charismatic age. Salvation is in Christ. Grace is in Christ. Get Christ, and you get everything. Miss Christ, and you miss everything (John 1:16-17; Colossians 1:19; 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

A form of godliness will do you no good. You must have Christ! A religious experience, without Christ, is a damning experience. You must have Christ!

2nd — Salvation is the gift of God! I gladly run the risk of appearing redundant. I repeat myself deliberately. How I want all who read these lines to see this! Salvation is God's free gift to sinners in Christ. It cannot be bought by sacrifice. It cannot be earned by works. It cannot be given by someone else. It cannot be inherited from your relatives. It is the gift of God! — *"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"*

The Question

Now, look at the question this woman asked. How is it that Christ alone has this gift? — *"Whence then hast thou that living water?"* How is it that Christ alone has grace, salvation, and eternal life in himself to give to needy sinners, and no one else and nothing else does?

It is true; salvation is the work of the triune God. The Father chose us. The Son redeemed us. The Holy Spirit converts us. But God the Father will not and cannot give us this living water without Christ. And God the

Spirit will not and cannot give us this living water without Christ. How is it that Christ alone has this living water to give to poor, needy, thirsty sinners? — *“Whence then hast thou that living water?”*

He has it because he is the only fit person to have it. God could never come down to man. Man could never rise to God. If ever the two come together, they must meet in a Mediator, a Daysman who can lay hold of both God and man. That Daysman, that Mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ alone is the Mediator between God and men (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5).

Did you ever notice how careful the writers of Holy Scripture were to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, almost always, in the most reverent, worshipful terms? Seldom did any speak of him only by his earthly name, *“Jesus.”* He is often called by his title, *“Christ,”* and by the term, *“the Lord.”* But he is most commonly called, *“the Lord Jesus Christ,”* because all that he is is essential to our salvation by him (Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

He has all salvation in himself because he is *“the Lord.”* Who should have it, but *“the Lord”*? — *“The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord!”* Salvation is his to give because he is *“Jesus,”* who came into this world to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He has salvation in himself to give to sinners because he is *“Christ,”* the Christ of God. He is *the Anointed One*, sent from God to be our Savior.

On the day of his immersion in the river Jordan to fulfill all righteousness, the Spirit of God descended upon him in the form of a dove, and abode on him. God gave the Spirit to him, without measure. He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. This is exactly what he announced to the Jews in the temple, when he began his public ministry (Luke. 4:16-21).

He has this *“living water”* of salvation, grace, and eternal life to give to sinners because he is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He also has this *“living water”* by divine purpose. The Lord Jesus Christ is authorized of God to be our Savior. He came here by Divine appointment to bestow upon needy sinners all the blessings of grace given to us in him before the world began (Romans 3:24-26; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Christ has this *“living water”* in himself to give to sinners because he obtained it by his blood. He earned it by his obedience to his Father’s will as our Mediator, Representative, Surety, and Substitute. And he bought it with his blood. This is the reward which his Father promised him and gave him, as the result of his accomplishments as our Mediator (John 17:2; 19:30; Hebrews 9:12; Isaiah 53:10-12).

Look up yonder, there upon the throne of God sits that Man who died in the place of sinners more than two thousand years ago. He ascended up on high and received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among men!

The Lord Jesus Christ has this *“living water”* in himself to give to us poor sinners because of who he is, because his Father purposed it, because of what he did to obtain it; and the Lord Jesus Christ has grace, salvation, eternal life, *“living water”* for poor, needy sinners because of his intercession in heaven as the sinners’ Advocate and great High Priest (Hebrews 7:25-27; 1 John 2:1-2).

Ask and Receive

This living water is yours for the asking! — *“Ask, and you shall receive.”* Is that not what our Lord told this Samaritan woman? — *“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”* (v. 10).

He does not have grace, salvation, eternal life, peace, pardon, atonement, forgiveness, and righteousness for himself. He needs none of these things. He has grace, in all its fulness that he may give it away!

Christ has living water, the living water of salvation and grace for thirsty sinners. He has this living water in an inexhaustible fulness. He promises to give it to all who ask him for it. He needs nothing from you – not even your water pot! Come, O poor, needy sinner, come — Come, O my soul, come – Come, O my brother — Come, O my sister, come to the Fountain and drink! — *“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Revelation 22:17).

Chapter 27

“Go, Call Your Husband”

or

Sin Exposed

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.”

(John 4:15-18)

If ever God is pleased to save a sinner, he will cause the object of his mercy to see himself as he really is; and he will cause him to see God as he really is. No one has ever been saved without seeing who he is and who God is. These two things always go together. You can never see God in his greatness, glory, and grace in the face of Christ, without seeing yourself in your corruption, confusion, and condemnation.

This is not a conclusion I have reached by reason. It is a fact plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. Every person in the Book of God, who is set before us as seeing God, immediately fell before him, broken and contrite, confessing his sin.

- Job (Job 42:16).
- Moses (Exodus 3:11; 19:16; Hebrews 12:21)
- David (2 Samuel 7:18)
- Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-6)
- Daniel (Daniel 10:8)
- Peter (Luke 5:8)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-9)

No one will ever be saved until he sees who God is and sees who and what he really is, until he is compelled by sovereign grace to bow in the dust before the throne of God almighty, confessing himself to be a justly condemned sinner before the holy Lord God, whose only hope is Christ. James Bioce wrote...

“Christianity begins by bringing men to the truth about their own depraved condition, but it does so to convince them of their need of Jesus Christ and to prepare them for understanding who He is and what He has accomplished for them by His death and resurrection.”

The only place you will ever see God in his true character is in the face of his crucified Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, “*in the cleft of the Rock*” where he revealed himself to Moses (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). If ever a person sees God in Christ, he will confess and acknowledge his sin. This is where Holy Spirit conviction is wrought, in the hearts of eternity bound sinners (John 16:8-11). As soon as a poor sinner confesses his sin, he obtains the forgiveness of sin by the faithfulness and justice of God, through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9).

In the story of the Samaritan woman recorded in this chapter, we see the Lord Jesus, the great soul winner, graciously bringing a sinner to just this place. The good Shepherd is here seeking one of his lost sheep; and he will not rest until he has fetched the sheep to himself.

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.”

Not Always Climactic

First, in verse 15 we learn that conversion is not always climactic. Redemption is climactic. Regeneration is climactic. But conversion is usually a process. Conversion is an experience of grace that is a process. — “*The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw*” (v. 15).

I can almost picture the scene. The Lord Jesus has been talking to this salty old gal about eternal life, grace, and salvation. But she did not understand anything he said. She was a little cocky, sarcastic, and rude. She was, she thought, just engaged in another banter about religion. She could not care less about what the Master was telling her. As she drops her water pot into the well, holds the rope with one hand, and wipes the sweat off her face with the other, she says, “Give me that water and you won’t see me doing this again.”

Yet, we should not be too harsh in our thinking about her, and the myriads like her. The carnal mind is always occupied with carnal things. The natural man sees everything with the confined vision of his depraved nature. He lives in the cramped, confined quarters of carnality. Therefore, all he can see, sense, and judge is limited to the carnal, the material, the fleshly. Left to himself, there he will live and there he will die.

Look at this poor woman. The Savior of the world was standing in front of her, but she did not know him. The Light of the world was in front of her, but she could not see him. The Sun of Righteousness was shining in her face; but she was not warmed by him.

She was, like most, full of questions. The Savior asked her for a drink of water, and she said – “*How?*” He told her to ask him for water, and she said – “*From whence?*” He spoke to her about living water, and she replied with a snicker – “*Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*”

All the while, the Lord Jesus was preparing her for grace. He was in the process of making her willing in the day of his power. Our Lord did not deal with this woman and the woman with an issue of blood the same way. And he does not deal with us all the same way, or bring us all down the same path. We must never presume that a person will never be converted because he is not immediately converted. And we must not presume that a person is not saved because he did not go through the same feelings, throes of the devil, or joyful ecstasy we may have experienced.

Suddenly, the Master did something totally unexpected. He stuck his finger right into this sinner’s heart. He raised an issue she had no interest in discussing. He had been sort of poking around until now, waiting for and creating the time to say what he had come there to say. Then, at precisely the right moment, he sticks his finger right into her heart and conscience. Look at verse 16. — “*Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.*”

Immediately, the woman responded, “*I have no husband*” (v. 17). She wanted the conversation to end right there. (At least, she thought she did!) But the Master had her on his hook. He was not about to let her go.

Conviction the Forerunner

“*The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.*” — Here our Lord shows us, *secondly*, that the conviction of sin is the forerunner of conversion.

Many imagine that such talk is unkind, that preachers ought never make people feel terribly uncomfortable. Preaching these days is intentionally evasive. If evil is dealt with, it is dealt with in such general, ambiguous terms that no one feels as if the preacher might be talking to them.

The Lord Jesus here slapped this woman in the face, at once exposing her deepest guilt, making her know that he knew. That slap across the face was the sweetest, kindest, most gracious and loving thing he could have done for her. Now, her pretensions were useless. She still tried to change the subject (vv. 20 and 25); but the hook was set. She did not really know what was going on; but she knew that all her thoughts and actions were known to this man who spoke to her. She knew that this man was able to tell her all things that ever she had done. Can you imagine how shocked, how utterly horrified she must have been?

Why did the Lord Jesus put her through this? Surely, there must be a better, an easier, a less painful way to deal with men and women than this. There isn't. The doctor who promises to cure your cancer without surgery or drugs, discomfort or inconvenience may make you feel good; but he is your enemy, not your friend. And those deceivers of men's souls, who would heal the wounds of your souls "*slightly, crying Peace, peace, when there is no peace,*" are butchers of souls, not the servants of God.

The fact is no one ever sought Christ who did not need him. You will never be saved until you are lost (Mark 2:17). Salvation is deliverance from danger. You will never flee to Christ for Refuge from the wrath of God until you know that you are under the wrath of God and deserve to be. You will never trust Christ until you know you are going to hell, and ought to. There is no conversion without conviction. There is no pardon of sin without a confession of sin. And there will never be a confession of sin from you until it is wrung out of you by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit.

This was the turning point in this woman's life. It is the turning point in every chosen sinner's life. Like the prodigal, you must come to yourself, or you will never come to Christ.

The Word of God declares that we are all sinners. — The totality of man's depravity, the utter corruption of our hearts and our nature is so plainly and frequently stated in the Word of God that it simply cannot be denied. Sin is what we all are, what we all do, and what we all love (Genesis 6:5; Psalms 14:1; 143:2; Romans 3:10-23; 1 John 1:8-10). Solomon said, "*There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.*" Some are hedonists, self-centered, make me happy, materialists (Romans 1:18-32). Others are moralists, philosophical ethicists (Romans 2:1-16). And others are religionists (Romans 3:10-23). But all are sinners. None do good, or even know what good is.

Every man's conscience condemns him for his sin. No matter what the rule book is by which you pretend to live, which you claim to be your standard, you do not measure up; and you know it. Some love to pretend that they live by the Ten Commandments, but none do. There is not even one of the commandments we do not all break all the time. Others tell us that they live by the Sermon on the Mount, but none come close to the standard there demanded (Matthew 5:48). Moralists who prefer not to be considered too religious claim Ben Franklin's code of ethics, or something like it, as their guide, but none measure up to the code. Many pretend to live by the Golden Rule; but no one really treats all others as he would have others treat him.

Yet, no man can convince another man of his utter sinfulness, his total depravity, his just condemnation. Only God himself can do that. Milford Hall rightly observed...

"It is as difficult to convince men of their lost condition as it is to recover them from it. Only God can do both! You cannot help anyone until he is willing to be helped; but our Lord can make him willing. A man cannot truly bear the gospel of sovereign grace until he cannot bear himself!"

That is what the Lord was doing with this Samaritan woman. The day of his power had come. Therefore he was making her willing. He makes us willing to be saved by getting us lost. He makes us willing to wash in his blood by making us get a smell of ourselves. He makes us willing to be robed in his righteousness by stripping us naked before him.

What a thought that is! — We are naked before the all-seeing eye of holy omniscience! God sees behind the masks we wear. — *“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”* (Hebrews 4:13).

The Samaritans

Let me show you something else. When the original inhabitants of Samaria were exiled from their land by the Assyrian king, people from five different places, each with their own gods, were brought in from Babylon to inhabit the land (2 Kings 17:29-33). If we would be married to Christ, we must be made to see that the gods of this world are false gods, and the religion of this world is wicked, abominable, and adulterous.

This poor sinner could not be married to Christ (spiritually) until she acknowledged that her Samaritan religion was adultery (whoredom), that her former gods were her adulterous lovers (whoremongers), and that her preachers were prostitutes. You may think I am stretching the allusion just a little. — I challenge you to search the Scriptures and see if that is not exactly what the Book of God tells us about all free will, works religion. Does not the Holy Spirit call the preachers of works dogs (male prostitutes)? Does not the Lord command us to abandon the adultery of false religion, to come out of Babylon, lest we be partaker of her sins and of her judgment (Revelation 18:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1)?

Christ’s Purpose

Look again at John 4:16, and learn this: — If the Lord Jesus ever exposes your sin to you, if he brings you down in the dusts of humiliation, it is that he might bring you up to himself. He exposes that he may pardon. He abases that he may exalt. He empties that he may fill. He strips that he may cloth. He slays that he may make alive. He destroys our refuge of lies that he might compel us to flee away to him for Refuge.

“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” — The Master did not simply say, *“Go, call thy husband.”* He said, *“Go, call thy husband, and come hither.”* I know that our first, immediate reaction, once we have seen ourselves corrupt and naked before God, is to run from him. Our first thought is – *“How can God have anything to do with one so vile as me?”* He can’t, except by Christ. Only by Christ’s blood atonement and perfect righteousness can the holy Lord God embrace such trash as we are. But, blessed be his name, in Christ he can, and he does! First, the Lord Jesus spoke a word of piercing truth to her conscience. *“Go, call thy husband.”* Then, he spoke this word of matchless grace to her heart. *“And come hither!”* Commenting on this portion of Holy Scripture, A. W. Pink wrote...

“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.”

Five Husbands or One

“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.” (John 4:16-22)

You can have five husbands for your soul, or you can have one. If you choose the five, you can never have the One; and the five you choose will be no husband to your soul. But if you choose the One, you will forever despise the five. Does that seem a little bewildering? By the time you finish reading this chapter, I hope God the Holy Spirit will make it perfectly clear to you.

Samaritan Origins

Did you ever wonder who the Samaritans were, where they came from, or why the Jews had no dealings with them? When Shalmaneser, the King of Assyria, conquered the ten tribes of Israel and carried them into bondage, he dispersed the Jews throughout his realm and sent his own subjects from Assyria to occupy and cultivate the land of Israel.

The Assyrians were pagans, idol worshipping pagans. They worshipped gods they could carry from one place to another. When they came into the land of Israel, they brought their own gods with them into the land. In time the Lord God sent lions into the land to devour these idolaters. Terrified of the lions, they asked the King of Assyria to send them a priest to teach them “*the manner of the God of the land,*” which he did.

Once they had learned “*the manner of the God of the land,*” they adopted Jehovah as their God, hoping to turn away His wrath; but they continued to serve their own gods. In other words, they professed to worship the Lord God of Israel, because they were afraid of Him; but they were not converted to Him.

In time, these pagan Assyrians intermarried with the Jews. They became known as Samaritans, a mongrel race, with a mongrel religion, with whom the Jews had no dealings. You may recall that in Nehemiah’s day, these Samaritans attempted to unite with the Jews in rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, but Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of the faithful refused their assistance, saying, “*Ye have nothing to do with us*” (Ezra 4:3). Israel’s faithful rulers at the time would not allow the Samaritans to join them in their work, not because they were a mixed race, but because they were a people with a mixed religion. Their religion was a mongrel religion. Like multitudes today, they were very religious, full of religious activity, but they knew not what to worship. In the last verse of our text, the Lord Jesus says of these people, “*Ye worship ye know not what!*” — The Samaritans represent sham conversion, false faith, and religious hypocrisy.

Confused Idolater

The Samaritan woman was now thoroughly confused. She perceived that the Lord Jesus was a prophet; but she did not understand what He was saying to her. She knew that the Jews’ religion excluded the possibility of her being saved, because she worshipped different gods, in different places, and in different ways, and the Jews worshipped Jehovah, Who alone is God. Yet, the Lord Jesus was talking to her about salvation, eternal life, and acceptance with God; and, with the same breath, He told her that her religion was a religion of uselessness, ignorance, and idolatry.

Since He never went to Bible College or seminary, and since He was not trained as either a politician or a preacher, our Master never learned the art of compromise or the trick of talking out of both sides of His mouth. These days, when preachers are confronted with such plain, stark contrasts in religions and religious opinions, they appeal to a vague spirit of ecumenism, and attempt to point to areas of agreement between mutually opposing ideas. Our Lord Jesus Christ was not such a man.

In fact, by the standards of modern religion and political correctness, He would be considered a rude, uncouth, bigot. Instead of dodging the issue, instead of attempting to be polite, the Lord Jesus seems to have stopped this Samaritan woman right in the middle of her words to drive the truth of God home to her heart. He shoots a straight arrow at the very core of her hope. He lays the axe to the root of the tree under which she was hiding. He rips down the veneer walls of her refuge of lies, and tears up the very foundation of her religious house.

He says to her, as she was attempting to defend her religion, “*Ye worship ye know not what!*” In other words, He said, “Woman, what I am telling you is this. — You don’t know God or anything about God, His worship, His people, or His salvation.” Then, He proceeded to tell her that all who truly worship God and obtain His salvation know who He is. — True worship is worship based upon and arising from revealed knowledge, the revealed knowledge of God Himself!

Question

I have a question, which I want you to answer, and answer honestly, for your own soul’s sake. — Do you know who you worship? Is your religion nothing more than that which has been passed along to you by flesh and blood, by human tradition, and religious ceremony, or do you know the living God? Is your religion the result of you being taught of a man, or the result of you being taught of God?

Many False Religions

There are many false religions by which the souls of men are deceived and damned. This woman’s religion was the religion of the world. The Samaritans were a mongrel race with a mongrel religion. You see this clearly in 2nd Kings 17. It was about 750 years before our Lord’s conversation with this woman that the ten northern tribes of the Jewish nation, Israel, were taken captive by the Assyrians.

Five People, Five Gods

When the original inhabitants of Samaria were exiled from their land by Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king sent people from five different places in Babylon, each group with its own god, to inhabit the land of Samaria. The Jews who were left in Samaria intermarried with these people and incorporated the worship of their gods into the worship of Jehovah. While they continued to claim that they feared and worshipped the Lord Jehovah, and convinced themselves that they did, they became base idolaters and forsook the worship of God altogether. Read 2 Kings 17:29-33.

“Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put *them* in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth¹, and the men of Cuth made Nergal,² and the men of Hamath made Ashima,³

¹ *Succothbenoth* was a god worshipped under the image of chickens, or Pleiades (the seven stars). For whom the women of Babylon and Assyria prostituted themselves at least once during their lives to any man who asked them to do so, in the temple of Venus.

² *Nergal* was the image of a great dog, the god of hunting and of war among the Cuthites.

³ *Ashima* was the god of Hamath, worshipped under the image of an ape or a goat with no fur.

And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak,⁴ and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.⁵ So 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 whom they carried away from thence.”

These five gods, like the five husbands this Samaritan woman had had, were all false gods of whoredom. As those men were not this woman’s husbands, (They took everything from her and gave her nothing!), so the gods of the heathen were not God and were not husbands to her needy soul. But He who was her Husband, the Lord Jesus, Who had espoused her to Himself from eternity, had come “*to take the names of Balaam out of her mouth*” and to teach her to call Him alone, “*My Husband*” (Hosea 2:16-17). O may He do that for you!

After a while, the southern tribes of the nation Judah were taken captive and carried away into Babylon for seventy years. But they never lost their distinct identity as Jews, and stoutly refused to worship the gods of Babylon.

Help Refused

When Judah was delivered from Babylon and began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (about 450 BC), the mongrel Samaritans offered to help them; but the faithful men of Judah refused their help. The Samaritans in anger built their own temple in Mount Gerizim; and the Jews and the Samaritans had no dealings with one another from that day forward. With the Samaritans, this was a matter of offended pride. The Jews would not accept them as the people of God. (Nothing more enrages a man than to be told plainly that he is lost, that his religion, the religion of his fathers is a false religion, and that his god is an idol.) With the Jews, at least when the rift occurred, this rift with the Samaritans was a matter of spiritual integrity. They could not embrace the Samaritans and their gods without becoming idolaters themselves

The Samaritans, like the people of this world, had many gods, many religious ceremonies, and many different names for their religion. Yet, like the many religions of the world today, all the Samaritans embraced one another as brethren and worshippers of Jehovah, though they refused to worship in the temple of God, at the altar of God, with the people of God. Though they wore many names and had different religious symbols and ceremonies, the religions of the Samaritans, were all essentially the same, just like the many religions of the world today (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Every man worshipped as he chose. The religions of Samaria, like the religions of Danville, KY and the religions of your town, were religions based upon human merit, not divine mercy. Being of human origin, all the religions of Samaria, like the religions of this world, were man centered, designed to please, entertain, and indulge the lusts of men. Just in case you are missing my point, let me state the matter plainly. — All free will, works religion is idolatrous and damning.

The adherents of such religion may claim to fear the Lord, walk in moral integrity, and talk incessantly about Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, blood redemption, and salvation by grace; but all who make salvation to be dependent upon or in any way determined by the will, works, and worth of man, rather than the will, worth, and work of Christ alone, are base idolaters.

⁴ Nibhaz was a dog, representing a demon. Tartak was a jackass, representing the prince of darkness. Both were probably made of gold.

⁵ Adrammelech was the sun god, in the form of a man. Anammelech was the moon god with the representation of a woman. They were images of Molech, to whom men and women offered their own children as sacrifices in fire.

All who seek to establish righteousness by something they do are ignorant of God, ignorant of the righteousness of God in Christ. Refusing to be saved by Christ alone, through grace alone, refusing to count their personal righteousness dung and their religion idolatry, they grope about in darkness, superstition, and ignorance on their way to hell, not knowing what they worship. They go to their high places Sunday after Sunday, observe their holy days, burn their incense, and make great sacrifices to their gods. But they are totally ignorant of the true and living God, totally ignorant of who Christ is and what he has done as the sinners' Substitute.

If we would be married to Christ, we must be made to see that the gods of this world are false gods and the religion of this world is wicked, abominable, and adulterous. There is no salvation for any sinner who refuses to repent of his dead works, whose conscience is not purged from the dead works of human religion by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14). No Pharisee can ever be saved until he is made to see, as Paul declares (Philippians 3:1-9), that his righteousnesses are filthy rags, obnoxious to God, and his religion is nothing but dung. — That's right, dung! False religion is not just gutter religion. It is outhouse religion!

This Samaritan woman, this poor sinner could not be married to Christ (spiritually) until she acknowledged that her Samaritan religion was adultery (whoredom), that her former gods were her adulterous lovers (whoremongers), and that her preachers were prostitutes. The same is true of all idolaters. — She had five husbands; but she had no husband. The same is true of the religious people of this world.

You may think I am stretching the allusion just a little. I am not stretching it at all. Is this or is it not exactly what the Scriptures tell us about all free will, works religion? Does not the Holy Spirit call the preachers of works dogs (male prostitutes)? "*Beware of dogs,*" Paul said. Then he identified the dogs as those who mix works and grace in the business of salvation — "*the concision.*" Does not the Lord command us to abandon the adultery of false religion, to come out of Babylon, lest we be partaker of her sins and of her judgment? (Read Revelation 18:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.)

One God, One Christ, One True Religion

The fact is there is only one true and living God, one Christ, one Savior, one Holy Spirit, and one true religion, and one true salvation. Our Lord spoke plainly to this Samaritan woman, both about her spiritual ignorance, and about God's salvation. Let me be just as plain as Him.

The world in which we live is under the delusion of antichrist. Arminianism, free willism, works religion, it matters not whether it wears the name Protestant or Papist, Baptist or Buddhist, is damning religion. The Spirit of God calls all religion that has for its center-piece the will of man, "*will worship*" (Colossians 2:23). And will worship is damning religion.

If this Samaritan woman would drink from the Fountain of living water, she must give up her broken cistern and its polluted waters. If she would have Christ to be her Husband and His salvation her Husband's provision, she must abandon her former husbands. If she found acceptance with God, she must disown the gods, the temple, and people of Samaria. And you and I must do the same.

If we would be saved, the Lord Himself must come to us and make Himself known to us. We must worship God alone in His true character as He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must worship God in Christ — The only true Christ! We must worship God by His Priest, Christ Jesus. We must worship at His Mercy-Seat, Christ. We must worship God on His Altar, Christ. We must worship the Lord God by His Sacrifice, the Lamb of God. We must worship Him in His Temple, Christ, at His throne in His way, by faith alone in Christ alone (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 4:16).

If you would be saved, like this Samaritan woman, you are going to have to identify yourself with Christ, His Gospel, His worship, and His people. This identification is made initially in believer's baptism; but it is a constant, life long thing. Believer's baptism, like good works, has nothing to do with salvation. And our identifying ourselves with Christ does not contribute one iota to our salvation. Yet, those who refuse to make such an identification with Christ are not saved (Matthew 10:32-33).

As in the Old Testament men and women found acceptance with God and had a Scriptural basis for claiming refuge and salvation in Him only when they became Jews, so today, no sinner has a biblical basis for assurance, a biblical basis for claiming grace and salvation in Christ, except those who come into God's kingdom, circumcised in heart, and are numbered among God's Israel.

Ruth the Moabite became Ruth the Jew (Ruth 1:16). Naaman the Syrian idolater became Naaman the worshipper of Jehovah, once the Lord poured out His grace upon him (2 Kings 5:17). Elisha sent him to wash in Jordan. The act meant he had to heed God's Word by His prophet and disown the far more physically attractive rivers of his own land, as well as the fake healers who had tried (in the names of their gods) to heal him. The great Naaman had to stoop to be healed God's way, in God's land, among God's people, or perish in his leprosy. The same is true of you!

Once the healing was done, when Naaman went back to Syria, he carried in his great caravan as much of the dirt of Israel as two mules could carry back to Syria, because he had become a Jewish convert, a worshipper of God. He worshipped God on God's altar of earth (Exodus 20:24-25). Though he lived and died in Syria, Naaman knelt to pray in Syria on Jewish soil, bowing toward the altar of God and the mercy-seat in the temple of God at Jerusalem, as a Jew, a sinner saved by grace alone, through the merits of that Savior of whom the altar, mercy-seat, temple, and the sacrifices were types!

In the days of Esther, after Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, many of the Persians became Jews, because the fear of God fell upon them (Esther 8:17).

Do you know who you worship? I do. I worship Him who is the Salvation of the Jews, the Seed of Abraham, the Covenant of the people, the Christ of God, the Savior of the world. I have no righteousness but Christ. I have no atonement but Christ. I have no access to God but Christ. I have no hope but Christ. Christ is my soul's Husband. And Christ is enough!

How many husbands do you have? — Five or one? If Christ is our Husband, if we are married to Him, oh, how devoted we ought to be to Him!

Chapter 29

Worship

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24)

How do you respond to a heart probing message? If, in the course of everyday conversation, a question or comment gets really close to you, reminds you of sin, secret sin, your personal sin and guilt before God, how do you react to it?

In the 4th chapter of John’s Gospel our Savior deliberately probed the heart of a fallen, guilty sinner. He exposed her adultery. That guilt before God that she tried to suppress, he deliberately stirred. She responded by defending her religion, by taking refuge in the religious traditions of her fathers and the religious ceremonies she had always observed (John 4:19-20). Then, after plainly declaring to her that her religion was a sham and that her imaginary spiritual knowledge was utter ignorance, the Lord Jesus said...

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.”

As soon as the Lord Jesus exposed her sin, this woman’s conscience was aroused. She was not yet converted; but she was concerned. What a hopeful thing it is when men and women become concerned about their sin, about their souls, about God, and judgment, and eternity. That is where we find this Samaritan woman. Before this, she thought little of these things. Now, she is troubled.

The Master probed matters of the most vital importance. She was disturbed by them; but her depraved heart naturally shrank from the Savior’s barbed arrows. She fled from the penetrating truth of God. It was too probing, too personal, too troubling, too humbling. But look where she tried to hide.

She flew to the best refuge she knew. She sought refuge in religion! That is the natural refuge of the carnal mind. When the Word of God first pricks the conscience, the sinner’s first, most instinctive reaction is to run to his religious refuge, like a frightened rat runs to its nest in the garbage dump.

The Samaritan woman tried to take the sharp edge off the Master’s words by discussing points of religious debate, denominational questions, and historical religious traditions. Such behavior shouldn’t surprise us. It is the natural, common response of sinners when confronted with their own sin and guilt before God.

Instead of confessing her sin and asking how she might be forgiven, she said, “*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*” (v. 20).

“*The carnal mind is enmity against God.*” — There is nothing so averse to human flesh as spiritual truth. I am not talking about that which is, as they say, “surreal.” I am talking about that which is spiritual, that which pertains to God, the gospel of Christ. The natural mind finds the most convenient way possible of avoiding the claims of Christ in the gospel. Instead of stopping to weigh the Word of God, depraved hearts run to questions about holy places, holy times, holy days, holy deeds, and holy customs, church dogma, and prophetic schemes. Men and women are willing to talk about and discuss almost any religious subject, as long as they can avoid having to deal honestly and pointedly with their own personal depravity, sin, and rebellion before God.

To her utter astonishment, the Lord Jesus informed this woman that the question she raised was irrelevant. The debate between the Jews and the Samaritans about where men ought to worship, now that Christ had come, was no longer significant. In effect, he said to her, “Woman, believe me, that question is of no importance now, for the hour comes, yea and now is, when all the externals of religion, all the holy days, sabbath days, sacrifices, priests, laws, and ceremonies of Israel, and the temple itself, must be completely abolished and replaced by true, spiritual worship.” What a shocker that was. What a shocker it still is! — All true worship is spiritual. All carnal, legal, ceremonial worship is idolatry.

In the two verses before us our Lord Jesus Christ gave a very brief, but thoroughly instructive, description of the necessity and nature of true worship.

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*”

Worship Essential

Worship is essential. Where there is no worship of God, there is no spiritual life, no knowledge of God, and no salvation. All who are born of God are worshippers of God (Philippians 3:3). — “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*” — This is not an optional thing. There is no choice in this matter. There are three “*musts*” in this context. All three refer to matters that are absolutely imperative. In John 3:7, our Lord said, “*Ye must be born again.*” In verse 14 of chapter 3, he said, “*The Son of Man must be lifted up.*” Here he says, God “*must*” be worshipped “*in spirit and in truth.*”

The order in which these three things is given is significant. All those and only those who are born again by God the Spirit were redeemed by God the Son. And all those and only those who are redeemed and justified by Christ’s blood and called by his Spirit can and will worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. It is written, “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 15:8).

Without question, the worship of God is the most important, most urgent, and most glorious action of humanity. Worship is the creature ascribing greatness and praise to the Creator. Yet, the sad fact is most of what passes for worship these days is anything but worship. That which men call worship today is designed for the pleasure, entertainment, indulgence, and gratification of the flesh, rather than for the celebration of God’s excellence and praise. Most churches these days have a service even more odious than the religious exercises of previous generations. It is called “contemporary” worship. It is well named; for in the dictionary, “contemporary” comes right before “contempt.”

Because true worship is essential to true Christianity, and because that which passes for worship in our day is a display of man’s contempt for God, rather than a display of reverence for God, we very much need to know what true worship is. The only place we can find out what worship is is in the Book of God. No one can define and describe true worship except the One we must worship. If we would worship God, we must worship him “*after the due order*” he has prescribed.

Here in John 4:23-24, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us five things about this business of worship. May God himself be our Teacher, as we seek to understand his doctrine in these two verses.

True and False

First, as I have already indicated, our Lord Jesus Christ here tells us that there is a true worship and a false worship. When the Samaritan woman began to talk about worship, our Lord quickly told her that she didn’t know anything about the matter. He said, “*Ye worship ye know not what.*” In other words, he said, “You don’t

have any idea what worship is.” He was, at the same time, asserting that even the worship of the Jews, in all their outward ceremonies and rituals, was no worship at all.

The worship of God in the Old Testament employed many carnal, typical, outward ordinances of divine service; but true worship, the worship of God was never merely outward and carnal, but was always inward and spiritual (Isaiah 1:2-18). That worship which is no more than an outward religious work, ritual, ceremony, formality, or service is not worship. This was the essence of our Lord’s doctrine in the Sermon on the Mount. He told us plainly that we must carefully avoid being satisfied with or in any way making a show of religious service. Our Lord Jesus told us in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, that all true worship is primarily inward. All true service to God is and must be primarily inward, not outward. Humility, faith, and repentance are inward graces, not an outward show (Matthew 5:1-12). Prayer is done in secret, not before men. Giving is to be done privately, not ostentatiously. Fasting is to be conducted without anyone being aware of it, except you and the Lord.

In the house of God there are worshippers and there are worshippers. We stand together. We sing the same hymns. We bow our heads together in prayer. We read the Scriptures. We hear the same message. But there is a vast difference between us. Some gather in the house of God, endeavoring to worship God. They want to know him, hear from him, know his will, and honor him. Others have no interest in these things at all. They gather with God’s saints in public worship out of a sense of duty, to soothe and pacify their consciences, to please friends or relatives, or just to save face. But they have no real interest in knowing, worshipping, honoring, and serving God.

Kinship with God

Second, true worship involves a kinship with God. In these two verses (John 4:23-24), the Lord Jesus speaks of something that was never spoken of in reference to divine worship in the Old Testament. He speaks of men and women on earth worshipping the living God as their Father in heaven!

In the Old Testament, the Lord God was honored as Adonai (God our Creator — The Cause and Support of All Things). He was revered as Jehovah (God our Savior, our Deliverer). He was praised as El-Shaddai (God Almighty — The Lord God Omnipotent). But no one ever thought of bowing before his august throne and saying, “*Our Father which art in heaven,*” until the Lord Jesus taught us to pray in that manner. The Lord Jesus Christ has given us a freedom of access to God by his blood which no one ever enjoyed before he came (Hebrews 10:19-22). God the Holy Spirit has come to us as the Spirit of adoption as the sons of God in effectual calling, giving us the liberty of faith to call God our Father (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-8). Believing on Christ, he has given us the power, the authority, and the right to be called and to call ourselves the sons of God (John 1:12-13).

“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.”

We worship the Lord God as our Sovereign, our Creator, our Law Giver, and our Judge, with utmost reverence. But we also worship him as our Father. What a privilege!

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:1-2)

Sons we are through God’s election,
Who in Jesus Christ believe.

By eternal destination,
Sovereign grace we now receive!

Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder!
Ask, “Oh why such love to me?”
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Savior’s family!

Grace Work

Worship is an inward work of the heart. It is a work, not of the body but of the heart, not of outward posture but of inward faith. It involves a kinship with God. And, *third*, true worship is a work of grace. Worship is a heart work, a son work, and a grace work. Our Savior declares that those who worship God in spirit and in truth are those who have been sought out by God and caused to worship him by his grace. Our Lord’s words are — “*For the Father seeketh such to worship him.*”

The implication is obvious. No man will ever truly worship God until he is sought of God and taught by his grace to worship him in spirit and in truth. — “*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple*” (Psalms 65:4). In other words, worship is not something man does for God. Rather, it is something God works in men by his grace. It is the work of God’s Spirit in us turning us to God. As one of the old hymn writers put it...

“Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came.”

That is exactly what David said. — “*Therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee*” (2 Samuel 7:27). Worship and prayer are not things which arise from the hearts of men, but things wrought in our hearts by grace. We come together with God’s saints to worship God because he has put it in our hearts to worship him.

Spiritual Worship

True worship is spiritual worship. How can I adequately say what needs to be said here? The word “worship” comes from two English words, “worth” and “ship”. Worship is “worth-ship.” It is assigning to God his true worth. If we do this, if we assign to God his true worth, we must do so in spirit, from our hearts.

The Greek word translated “worship” means “to kiss the hand, like a dog licking his master’s hand. It means to fawn, couch, bow to, prostrate one’s self.” All these things imply an act and attitude of the heart, something inward and spiritual. Our Lord is telling us that there is no true worship, except that which takes place in the heart. Worship is not a physical, bodily function. We must never mistake acts of the body (kneeling, making signs with our hands, rubbing beads, etc.) for worship. Worship is inward, a matter of the heart, not merely carnal, outward, religious exercise. — “*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*” (1 Timothy 4:8). Worship is more than an emotional experience. It may involve weeping and/or laughing, but it is not a feeling. Worship is a spiritual, mental thing, a work of the heart.

No Images

If we would worship God, we must not use any religious images, crosses, symbols, pictures, statues or physical representations of God. Spiritual worship is simple, unadorned worship. In 2nd Kings 18 we are told that the

children of Israel kept the brazen serpent Moses made in the wilderness and burned incense to it until the days of Hezekiah, who finally destroyed it, calling their cherished idol a worthless piece of brass. The use of images in the worship of God was an act of idolatry in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:3-5); and it is idolatry today. Crucifixes, crosses, pictures and images of Christ and angels have no place in the church of God, and have no place in your house or mine, if we worship God.

No Holy Things

If we would worship God, we must not honor any day as a holy day, or any place as a holy place. To the believer, every day is holy and every place is holy. We call every day “the Lord’s day,” and every place “Jehovah-Shammah” (Colossians 2:8-23).

All true worship is inward, spiritual, heart worship. It is the worship of God by faith in Christ. Christ is our Altar of Sacrifice. Christ’s blood is the Laver in which we are cleansed. Christ, the Bread of Life, is our Table of Showbread. Christ’s intercession is our Incense. Christ is our Ark of Testimony. Christ is our Paschal Lamb. Christ is our great High Priest. Christ is God present with us! To worship God in the spirit is the worship of faith. It is calling upon him, trusting his dear Son in our hearts (Romans 10:9-13).

Why is this simple, spiritual worship such a very rare thing? Fallen man wants a god he can see and feel, a god he can show to others. Fallen man, like Cain, wants a god he can impress and obligate by his gifts and works. It is far easier to go through a form, a ceremony, a ritual, and a liturgy than it is to worship God in spirit. If we worship God in spirit, we must acknowledge, confess, and seek the forgiveness of our sins. It is impossible to traffic in spiritual worship. If we worship God in spirit, we have no idols, icons, or trinkets to sell, no priests to serve and fear, no holy places to reverence, and no rewards to win or lose.

In Truth

Fifth, if we would worship God, we must worship him in spirit and in truth. Worshipping God in truth means that we must worship him truthfully, with sincerity, honesty, and uprightness. To worship in truth is to worship without duplicity. We cannot worship God until we open our hearts before him, take off all masks, and do away with all pretense. Whether in the public assembly of God’s saints, or in the quietness, stillness, and darkness of the night watches upon our beds, if we would worship God, we must be deliberately naked before him (Matthew 15:8-9).

But there is more. If we would truly worship God, we must worship him in accordance with revealed truth, as he is revealed in Christ, who is the Truth. And we must worship him according to the Word of Truth (John 17:17). What does that mean? Without question, it means much, much more than I can discuss in this study. But it certainly means these two things:

1. If we worship God, in his house, in our assemblies for public worship, we must worship him in the way he has prescribed. — Let us worship our God “*after the due order.*” If we worship God in the observance of baptism, we only baptize believers, and we only baptize by immersion. If we worship God in observing the Lord’s Supper, we observe the ordinance as our Lord and his disciples did, with unleavened bread and wine. In the house of God the Triune Jehovah is worshipped not by waving and clapping your hands, shaking your hips and dancing, but by reading his Word, singing his praise, seeking his mercy, and preaching his gospel.
2. If we worship God, we must worship him confessing our sins, like the publican, and trusting Christ’s blood and righteousness as our Substitute. We must worship God upon an altar of his making, not ours, upon an altar of earth, without steps, an altar of free grace alone (Exodus 20:24-26). And that Altar is the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:10).

Worshippers Sought

“The Father seeketh such to worship him.” — How that statement ought to fire our hearts! Does the holy, Lord God seek men and women to worship him? Indeed he does (Song of Solomon 2:14). The God of Glory is seeking a people to worship him in spirit and in truth, a people to worship him upon the basis of blood atonement, by the power of his Spirit, with a heart of faith, looking to Christ. Will you worship him?

Who worships God?

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

In the light of that statement, here is a question that can be answered only by the Word of God. It cannot be answered upon the basis of our feelings, sentiments, or emotions. It cannot be answered by creeds, confessions of faith, or religious customs. Who worships God? Only the Word of God can tell us who truly worships God.

“*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*” But it is ever the nature and tendency of fallen man to pervert the worship of God. Multitudes are blessed with ordinances of divine worship. But rather than using the ordinances to worship God in spirit and in truth, they pervert them into carnal ceremonies, services, and rituals, without regard to God. Multitudes content themselves with the bodily exercise of outward worship and neglect the inward reality of spiritual worship. All men by nature prefer gaudiness to godliness!

Not Bodily Exercise

God the Holy Ghost declares, “*Bodily exercise*” (the mere outward motions of divine worship) “*profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*” (1 Timothy 4:8). You and I are impressed by, pleased with, and dedicated to outward religion. “*But the Lord looketh on the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). And “*that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God*” (Luke 16:15).

Understand what I am saying. — Outward public worship and the outward service of God must never be neglected. But if outward worship is all we have, our worship is vain worship! The absence of a true heart, the absence of heart faith in Christ, and heart devotion to the glory of God makes all outward acts of religion vain worship.

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid” (Isaiah 29:13-14).

In Matthew 15:1-9 our Lord Jesus Christ (the Lord who spoke in Isaiah 29) applied those words to the Pharisees of his day and to all in our day who pervert the worship of God into nothing but hypocritical, outward religious service. The Pharisees added to the Word of God the traditions of men, and insisted upon obedience to their traditions (Matthew 15:3). And they *perverted the commandment* of God to suit their own self-serving, self-righteous, hypocritical religion (Matthew 15:5-6; Mark 7:6-13).

“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his

father or mother, *It is Corban*¹, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free*. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye” (Mark 7:6-13).

The Lord Jesus declares that all such religion is both vain and hypocritical, — an utter abomination to God!

Five Statements

Here are five statements by which Holy Scriptures identifies who worships God.

1. All merely outward religion, that which does not involve heart worship, is vain worship.

“This people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me.” They prayed and called upon the name of God. They professed to be the people of God. They said they believed the doctrine of God. They practiced the ordinances of God. But their hearts were far removed from God; and God regarded their vain worship as an abomination, a mere form of godliness (Isaiah 1:10-18; 66:1-3).

2. All acts of divine worship, precepts of righteousness, and doctrines imposed upon the church by the traditions and customs of men are but vain worship.

God says, in Isaiah 29:13, *“Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men!”* Church creeds, doctrinal confessions, and religious liturgies teach and require many things contrary to the gospel of Christ and the clearest possible instruction of Holy Scripture. The practice of those things required by men is not worshipping God. The observance of mass, religious holy days, infant baptism, the substitution of sprinkling or pouring water for baptism, and the keeping of sabbath days are all things spoken of in the Book of God as “will worship” (Colossians 2:8-23), not God worship.

3. All true worship is a work of the heart (John 4:23-24; Philippians 3:3; Romans 10:9-10).

Faith is a heart work. Repentance is a heart work. Singing is a heart work. Praying is a heart work. Preaching is a heart work. Hearing is a heart work. Baptism is a heart work. Communion (the observance of the Lord’s Supper) is a heart work.

It is not the bodily exercise of religious service that God requires, but godliness. God wants our hearts! — *“My Son, give me thine heart.”* If he has our hearts, he will accept our services of divine worship for Christ’s sake. But if he does not have our hearts, God will never accept our services!

4. If we attempt to fool God with the hypocrisy of vain worship, God will leave us to the folly of vain religion.

“Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” (Isaiah 29:14).

¹ **Note:** “Corban” means a gift dedicated to God that cannot be used for any other purpose — Yet, they did! They used traditions, their pretentious religious taboos, as an excuse for their hardness, but never fulfilled their claims. They would never give “Corban” (their vowed gift) to their needy parents; but they didn’t give it to God either!

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth *if* he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; *even* a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?” (Joel 2:12-14)

In this day of spiritual darkness, idolatry, paganism, and superstition, let us return to our God, and return to the worship of our God, in spirit and in truth.

5. The Holy Spirit gives us a striking example of true worship in the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:1-14.

The Apostle Paul is held before us in Holy Scripture as an example of what we ought to be. His conversion, we are told, is the pattern of true conversion. His preaching is the standard of all true gospel preaching. And his worship is here held before us upon the pages of Inspiration by the Spirit of God as an example of what it is to worship God in spirit and in truth.

A Delightful Exhortation

This chapter begins with a sweet, delightful exhortation (v. 1). — Paul says, “*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*” He used this word, “*rejoice,*” ten times in the four chapters of this short epistle. We ought to always, in the depths of our hearts and souls, rejoice in the Lord. No matter what our providential experiences and circumstances are, we always have reason to rejoice in the Lord. Here is an exhortation to joy. What a blessed command! — “*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say rejoice*” (4:4). As we rejoice in him, we worship him.

Let all who know the Lord Jesus Christ rejoice in the greatness of his person as our all-sufficient Substitute, rejoice in the power of his blood which cleanses us from all sin, rejoice in the perfection of his righteousness which is imputed to us for justification and imparted to us in sanctification, rejoice in the abundance of his grace which is always sufficient for us, rejoice in the immutability of his love which never fails, rejoice in the rule of his providence which works all things together for our good, rejoice in the fact of his intercession which is continual and effectual on our behalf, and rejoice in the fact that your names are written in heaven.

This is the exhortation with which Paul opens this chapter — “*Rejoice in the Lord!*” May God give us grace ever to do so for the glory of Christ and the good of his people.

A Serious Warning

In verse 2, the apostle gives us a serious warning. — “*Beware of dogs.*” — He warns us here to beware of false prophets. He calls them dogs because that is what the Word of God calls male prostitutes. False prophets are men who have for their own sakes prostituted the gospel of Christ and the glory of God (Deuteronomy 23:18; Isaiah 56:10-11).

“*Beware of evil workers.*” — This is a warning against those who teach, preach, and promote any system of man centered, works based, free will religion (Matthew 7:22-23). Man centered, works based, free will religion is the single greatest evil and the single greatest cause of evil in this world. The “good works” of religion without Christ are the most abominably evil works done in this world. Throughout the Scriptures of the Old Testament and of the New, they are compared to prostitution, harlotry, sodomy and drunkenness. They rob God of his glory. They trample underfoot the blood of Christ. They do despite to the Spirit of grace. And they gradually abase man to his lowest, most contemptible state (Romans 1:25-31).

“*Evil workers*,” as Paul uses the term in this context, are will-worshipping Arminians, free-willers, and legalists, people who teach that God’s salvation depends upon and is determined by man.

“*Beware of the concision.*” — Those who are of the concision are men and women who cut, mutilate, and torture their bodies (doing penance, observing Lent, living in monkeries and nunneries, observing religious taboos) in hope of winning God’s favor.

In a word, Paul is saying, “Beware of Christless religion.” Beware of any religious custom, doctrine, or service that is centered in yourself and encourages you to focus attention on yourself.

True Religion Described

In Philippians 3:3 we are given a description of true religion. Here the Holy Ghost tells us who truly worships God. This is what it is to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

True religion is not man centered, but Christ centered. True religion is not ceremonial, but spiritual. True religion is not a matter of creed, but of conviction. True religion is not outward, but inward. — “*For we are the circumcision*” — We are God’s true, covenant people, the Israel of God, Abraham’s true children, which “*worship God in the Spirit*” — We worship God as he is revealed in the Scriptures, by the power of his Holy Spirit, in our spirits, and in a spiritual manner. True worship is spiritual worship, not carnal, ceremonial ritualism (John 4:23-24). — “*And rejoice in Christ Jesus*” — We trust the Lord Jesus Christ alone, placing all our confidence in him as our Savior. We are complete in him (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Colossians 2:9-10). — “*And have no confidence in the flesh*” — We place absolutely no confidence in our flesh, the experiences, emotions, or (imaginary) excellencies of our flesh. The privileges of the flesh, the feelings of the flesh, and the works of the flesh are no basis of confidence before God.

True Self-denial

In verses 4-8, Paul is set before us as an example of true self-denial. True worship involves a deliberate denial of self before God, a complete denial of any claim, any rights, or any worth before the Holy Lord God.

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung.”

Self-denial is an essential aspect of saving faith. Though it increasingly comprehends all aspects of life as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, self-denial begins with a denial of all personal worth and merit as a grounds of hope before God.

Here is a legalist of highest order laying aside the filthy rags of his self-righteousness for the blessed, pure, perfect righteousness of Christ. Paul counted all his fleshly, carnal, natural privileges, religious distinctiveness, and educational advantages as nothing but dung before God. He placed no confidence in his flesh. He found Christ, that one Pearl of Great Price, and sold everything he had to get it (Matthew 13:45-46).

— This was done on the Damascus Road when the Lord saved him (v. 7). And this was a decision he made every day, with increasing, growing commitment and consecration to Christ. He counted all things but dung for Christ.

Four Great Ambitions

Why? What was the cause of this man's self-denial, consecration, and commitment? What made this man willing to forsake everything and follow Christ? Paul was inspired, motivated, and driven to the point of utter obsession by four great ambitions of faith. He gives us those four great ambitions in verses 8-11.

“That I may win Christ!” — To worship God in the Spirit is to seek Christ. What an ambition! The life of faith is the lifelong pursuit of Christ. Faith looks upon Christ as the most precious, most desirable, most lovely, most valuable Person and Object in the world. The more he is known, the more he is wanted. Therefore true faith willingly forsakes all to follow him.

Christ is the Treasure hidden in the field, for which we would gladly spend all. He is the Pearl of Great Price, for which we must sell all. Jesus Christ is the *“one thing needful”* who must be chosen. Christ is the one thing we must have.

I am thankful for the many comforts of life with which I am blessed; but I must have Christ. I am thankful for my friends; but I must have Christ. I am thankful for health; but I must have Christ. I am thankful for my family; but I must have Christ. — *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things loss that I may win Christ.”*

“And be found in him!” (v. 9) — To worship God in the Spirit is to seek to be found in Christ, *“not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”*

This is the believer's standing. We are in Christ. This is Christianity. This is salvation — to be in Christ, nothing less, nothing lower, nothing different. It is not partly in Christ and partly in the law, or partly in the ordinances, or partly in the church. To be saved is to be in Christ. Religion is knowing doctrines and facts. Salvation is knowing God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). Religion is knowing what I believe. Christianity is knowing whom I believe (2 Timothy 1:12). Religion is being reformed. Salvation is being regenerated (John 3:3). Religion makes men new converts. Christianity makes us new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). Religion is being in the church. Salvation is being in Christ (John 15:1; Ephesians 5:30). Believers are people who are in Christ by God's eternal decree, by the Holy Spirit's operations of grace, and by personal faith. We are a people grafted into Christ by God's mighty operations of grace.

To be in Christ is to have perfect righteousness before God. Our righteousness is not something we establish by performing good works, but something Christ established for us as our Representative before God. We do not make ourselves righteous by our obedience to God's law. Christ made us righteous by his obedience to the law for us (Romans 5:19). Our righteousness before God is the righteousness of God in Christ imputed to us and imparted to us by God himself. We have been made the righteousness of God in Christ.

As I stand before the holy Lord God, I want to be found in Christ. As I live in this world, when I offer any service, prayer, or sacrifice to him, when I leave this world, when I stand before his great bar of judgment, I want to be found in Christ!

“That I may know him!” (v. 10) — To worship God in the Spirit is to seek to know Christ. I know that Christ is mine and I am his. Yet, I count all things but loss and dung, that I might win Christ, that I might be found in Christ, that I might know Christ. I know him; but, oh, how I want to know him! I want constantly

renewed, ever increasing knowledge of and communion with the Son of God. This is the ambition of my heart. I want to know him, my God and my Savior, my Redeemer and my Lord!

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” (Philippians 3:10)

I want to know him who is the great Benefactor of my soul. O that I may know him! — That I may know the mysteries and glories of his person, the riches of his grace, the greatness of his salvation, the benefits of his mercies, and the depth of his love! May God give us grace never to take our eyes off of Christ! My soul, make Christ the all-consuming Object of your being! *“That I may know him!”*

I want to *“know him in the power of his resurrection.”* The power of his resurrection declares that I am justified (Romans 4:25). The power of his resurrection gave me spiritual life (Ephesians 1:19). The power of his resurrection guarantees my resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:47-49). But I want to live every day, experimentally, walking in the knowledge of the power of his resurrection. Walking with Christ in the newness of life, I want the power of his resurrection to dominate, control, and direct my life in all things. I want to be continually made new by him.

I want *“to know him in the fellowship of his sufferings,”* to know my personal interest in his sufferings, and to know what he accomplished in his sufferings. As his sufferings are his glory, I want his sufferings to be my glory (Galatians 6:14). I want to know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings to such an extent that I am ever *“being made conformable unto his death.”* I want to be conformed to Christ in his death, entirely consecrated to the glory of God, perfectly submissive to the will of God, motivated by nothing but love for my God and his people.

“If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (vv. 11-14) — To worship God in the Spirit is to seek life in, by, and with Christ. Certainly, this includes a great desire for the resurrection of our bodies at the last day. But primarily, the yearning spoken of here is a yearning for that moral, spiritual resurrection of grace that lifts us out of the death and darkness of sin. The world, the flesh, and all human life is death. In Christ there is life, real life, eternal life, a life of righteousness, peace and joy in communion with God. This is what we want. We have not yet attained it; but we are reaching for it. — We want what God purposed for us in eternity and Christ purchased for us at Calvary (Ephesians 1:3-6). Every saved sinner wants to be like Christ!

These are the ambitions of our hearts, the goals we seek, the things for which we live. I pray that God will make them more and more real to me. And I pray that he will make them your heart’s ambitions as well.

- *“That I may win him.”*
- *“And be found in him.”*
- *“That I may know him.”*
- *“If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”*

Child of God, set your hearts upon these things, and by the grace of God you shall have them (vv. 20-21).

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Worship, true worship is not an act, or event, or ceremony. To worship God in spirit and in truth is to worship God in the totality of our lives. It is to live by faith in Christ, for the glory of God.

“I that speak unto thee am he.”

“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*. 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? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” (John 4:25-30)

There is a day appointed by God for the salvation of his elect, a day fixed from eternity when grace will come to the chosen sinner, an hour determined before the world began when the Good Shepherd will seek out and find his lost sheep. There is a time fixed before time began called “*the time of love*,” when the predestined child, the elect sinner, redeemed by the blood of Christ, must be saved. At that hour, salvation must and shall come to the soul loved of God with an everlasting love. The story of the Samaritan woman’s conversion portrays this fact vividly.

“Once as the Friend of sinners dear,
A man of sorrows sojourned here;
Eternal love ordained it so,
That through Samaria He must go.

But what could His dear feet incline,
Unless compelled by love divine,
From whence salvation’s blessings flow,
That He must through Samaria go?

There wand’ring from the fold of God,
He saw the purchase of His blood;
And o’er this wretch to lust a slave,
Did sovereign grace her banner wave.

Herein discriminating grace
Shone with a bright, refulgent blaze:
While dead in sin ten thousands lie,
Grace brought this rebel harlot nigh!

Roused from her fond, delusive dream,
As Israel’s God she worshipped Him,
Drank of that living water pure,
That shall to endless years endure.

This object of eternal love,
Ordained to fill a throne above,
Shall in the gospel annals shine,
And prove election all divine.

Jesus our Shepherd, God and King,
Thy guardian care and love we sing;
And hail that grace both rich and free,
That brings Thy wand’ring sheep to Thee.

Glory to God, till this takes place,
Bulwarks of fire and walls of grace,
Keep all His blood bought flock secure,
Till calling proves election sure!”

— *John Kent*

Perhaps some who read these lines are in such a state of mind that you ask, perhaps you have been asking for some time, — “If God is pleased to save me, if he is pleased to grant me life and grace in Christ, how will I know? How will I know when the Lord has saved me? How will I know that God has performed his work of grace in me?”

A Word of Caution

While there is clearly a pattern of grace revealed in Holy Scripture; it is only a pattern. There are several specific things God does in and for sinners when he saves them by his grace; but our experience of grace differs widely. With some of God’s elect, conversion is a climatic, revolutionary experience. With others, it is a very gradual thing. We must never attempt to judge the validity of a person’s faith by the yardstick of our experience, or the validity of our faith by the yardstick of another’s experience. We examine our faith by the Word of God alone.

It is also a mistake to make the order in which we experience the various aspects of God’s grace a matter of great concern. Our perception of things in the experience of them is often very different from reality. For example: There is no question that the new birth is the cause of faith; but we know we are born again only after we believe. Repentance and faith are so closely mingled that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other, though they are separate graces.

God’s Method of Grace

So, as I show you what happens when God saves a sinner, while I will give you five distinct things, do not concern yourself with the order of these things, just with the reality of them. And you can be certain that whenever the Lord Jesus Christ comes to save a sinner by the power and grace of his Spirit, he does for that sinner exactly what he did for the Samaritan woman in John 4.

If ever you are saved, you must and shall be saved by God’s work, not your own, by God’s will, not your own, by God’s doing, not your own (Romans 9:16). And if God almighty ever saves you by his grace, he will do these five things for you and in you.

1. If the Lord Jesus Christ ever saves you by his grace, he will cross your path.

“He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. 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. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” (John 4:3-7)

What a wonder! – The Son of God came to Samaria to seek out a fallen woman from Sychar! This woman could not and would not come to Christ. He came to her! The name of God’s church is “*Sought Out*” (Isaiah 62:11-12). Salvation does not begin with man seeking God, but with God seeking man. You will never be saved, unless and until God almighty steps in your way, crosses your path, and stops you in your mad rush for hell.

2. You will never have an interest in the salvation of your soul and the things of God unless the Lord God creates an interest in you.

That is what our Lord did for this Samaritan woman. When she came out to Jacob's well, she had no interest in him, in the glory of God, or in eternal life. Oh, she was interested in religion, and in staying out of hell; but she had no interest in the things of God, until the Lord Jesus made her interested.

In verses 7-15, the Master got her interested in water. No doubt, she was at first only interested in water for selfish, carnal reasons. Yet, there was such spiritual truth in what the Master said that she could not put it out of her mind. I can almost hear her thinking — “Who is this man? What is this living water? Where does he have this water? How can he give it to me? I sure would like to have whatever it is he is talking about.”

3. Still, something else must be done. If God ever saves you, if the Lord ever has mercy on your soul, if ever the grace of God that brings salvation comes to you, the Lord God will expose your sin to you, just as he exposed this woman's sin to her.

“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.” (John 4:16-19)

Painful as it is (And it is painful!), you are going to have to face, deal with, and honestly confess your sin before the holy Lord God. It is painful business for God to stick his finger in your heart and rip it open; but if he never rips it open, he will never bind it up. He wounds first. Then he heals. He strips. Then he clothes. He slays. Then he makes alive. He takes away. Then he gives. He creates a thirst. Then he quenches it. He makes you hungry. Then he feeds you. He empties. Then he fills. He never does things the other way around.

4. I do not know whether you will ever flee to Christ for refuge or not; but I do know this – You will never flee to him for refuge, until he destroys your false refuge.

I do not know what your refuge of lies is; but I know you have one; and you will never forsake it until God destroys it (Isaiah 28:14-20). Before the Lord saved this Samaritan harlot, he destroyed her religious refuge (vv. 19-24). Then...

“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*. 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? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” (John 4:25-30).

5. If ever the Lord God saves you, if ever you come to know and trust the Son of God, he must reveal himself to you and in you.

Salvation comes by revelation. You cannot trust an unknown Christ. And you can never know him until he makes himself known to you (2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Galatians 1:15-16). — “*The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*”

“I am he”

Never did the Lord Jesus, while he walked upon the earth, make himself known to anyone more clearly and fully than he did here to this Samaritan sinner. Here, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. The Master declares to this woman his great name (Isaiah 52:6). When the Savior said, "*I AM HE*," he was saying to this woman, "I am he of whom the Scriptures speak."

We must never underestimate the faith and knowledge of God's saints in the Old Testament. God's elect were saved in the Old Testament in exactly the same way they are today. God has only one way of saving sinners. That way is Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. Christ was the Object of all true faith in the Old Testament, just as he is today. What amount of knowledge those Old Testament believers had, I cannot tell. It is not clearly revealed. Yet, we do know that Eve understood the promise that the Redeemer would be a man of the woman's seed (Genesis 3:15). Abel knew about blood atonement (Genesis 4). Abraham knew that the Redeemer would be God incarnate (Genesis 22:8). David clearly understood that forgiveness is sure through the blood atonement of a crucified Substitute (Psalms 22; 32, 51). Enoch even spoke plainly about the Lord's Second Advent (Jude 14). Even Job, in that which is probably the first book written in the Inspired Volume, describes Christ as our Redeemer and speaks of the resurrection at the last day (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah understood that the sinner's Substitute is both God and man in one person, whose work of redemption and grace must be effectual to the salvation of chosen sinners (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-9; 52:13-53:12).

Numerous other references could be given. These are, truly, only a few; and they were randomly selected. Yet, they will suffice to make my point irrefutable. Old Testament saints knew and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their effectual, almighty, crucified, risen, reigning Savior.

It is also clear, to even a casual reader of Holy Scripture, that the saints of the Mosaic era clearly understood and rejoiced in the gospel doctrines of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ.

- Divine Sovereignty (Psalms 115:3; 135:6; Daniel 4:35-37; Isaiah 46:9-11)
- Total Depravity (Psalms 14)
- Unconditional Election (Psalms 65:4; 2 Samuel 23:5)
- Limited Atonement (Isaiah 53:8-11)
- Irresistible Grace (Psalms 65:4; 110:3)
- Perseverance of the Saints (Psalms 23:6)

In a word, God gave those saints in the Old Testament faith just as he gives us faith, by supernatural revelation, by revealing Christ to and in chosen sinners. Obviously, the Revelation of God in Scripture was not as full in Job's day as it was in Moses', or in Moses' day as it was in Malachi's, or in Malachi's day as it was in John the Baptist's, or in John the Baptist's day as it was in Paul's. Yet, I must personally acknowledge that I have never begun to experience the quality of faith that Noah exhibited in building the ark, Abraham exhibited on Mt. Moriah, or Moses exhibited in dealing with Pharaoh and Israel. Those men believed God! They knew, worshipped, and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Scriptures of the Old Testament speak (John 5:39). — The Book of God is all about the Son of God.

When the Lord Jesus said to this Samaritan woman, "*I AM HE*," he was declaring himself to be God incarnate, the great "*I AM*" in human flesh. We lose much in our English translation of this 26th verse. It would be far more accurate to translate the Master's words, "*I AM*." Young's Literal Translation translates John 4:26, "*Jesus saith to her, 'I am he, who am speaking to thee.'*" "*I AM*" was the Old Testament name by which the one true and living God, the Triune Jehovah revealed himself to Moses. This was a name no Scribe would write without first bathing himself. Yet, here is a man, standing in front of a sinner in need of mercy, declaring himself to be the "*I AM!*"

Our Lord Jesus Christ made this claim no less than fourteen times in John's Gospel. Fourteen times he publicly took to himself this title which belongs to none but God (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5). He said "*I AM the Bread of Life*" (6:35), "*I AM the Light of the World*" (8:12; 9:5), "*I AM the Door*" (10:7, 9), "*I AM the Good Shepherd*" (10:11, 14), "*I AM the Resurrection and the Life*" (11:25), "*I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (14:6), "*I AM the Vine*" (15:1, 5).

This name, "*I AM*," is our Savior's declaration that he is God come to save! He made himself known to this sinner as the One of whom the Scriptures speak, and as God in human flesh.

And when our Master said, "*I AM HE*," he was declaring to this woman that he is the Messiah promised long before. The word Messiah means "Anointed." It means exactly the same thing as the word "*Christ*." Both the Jews and the Samaritans expected the Messiah to be a man, anointed, chosen, set apart, consecrated by God and to God, in whom all the divinely appointed offices of the Old Testament would be fulfilled: Prophet, Priest, and King. — The Lord Jesus declared to this woman that he is that man, and that he is God, the God-man: the Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18) who shows us all things, the Priest Like Melchizedek who brings us to God, and the King Like David who delivers us from all our enemies, rules us, protects us, and provides for us.

"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

This man, the man who died at Calvary, the man who is the Christ, the man who now sits in glory, this man who is the Savior of the world, says to you and me — "*I AM HE!*" — He of whom the Scriptures speak. — God incarnate. — The I AM. — The Christ. — The Messiah. — The Salvation of Israel!

"Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:9)

Sychar's Sinner Saved

“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? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” (John 4:27-30)

“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?” — “And upon this.” Upon what? What is John referring to with those words? He is talking about our Lord’s revelation of himself to this Samaritan woman. He had crossed her path. He had created an interest in her soul. He had exposed her sin. He exposed her to herself. He had destroyed her refuge of lies. He had just revealed himself to her. — *“Jesus said unto her, I that speak unto thee am he”* (v. 26).

Then, we have a sad, sad picture drawn by God the Holy Spirit in verse 27! Our Lord Jesus had come to Samaria on a mission of mercy. The good Shepherd had just found one of his lost sheep. He had revealed himself to a woman of ill-repute and converted her by his almighty grace.

Shocked Disciples

The disciples had been away buying some groceries. They were totally ignorant of the conversation between the Lord Jesus and this Samaritan woman. They did not know what had happened. But when they came on the scene and saw the Lord Jesus talking to this Samaritan woman in a public place, they were shocked by what they saw. They immediately thought, “This doesn’t look good.”

These men, saved though they were, thought to bring the Son of God before their bar and judge his actions. What brazen audacity! Yet, it is very common. Nothing in this world is more difficult for us to shake than the grave clothes of self-righteous, legal religion and all the taboos men have invented. Religious men invent a multitude of customs, traditions, and moral codes, by which they would nullify the Word of God and attempt to govern the lives of others. This is exactly what these disciples did here.

They *“marveled that he talked with the woman.”* They marveled because the Jews had very strict, well known laws regarding such behavior. Their law (not God’s law, their law) said, “A man must not multiply discourse with a woman, even his wife, much less with his neighbor’s wife.” — Their religious teachers said, “When a man talks with a woman, he is the cause of evil to himself, and ceases from the words of the law, and will at last go down into hell.” — This was especially thought to be a very evil thing, if the conversation took place in public, in an inn, or in the street. — This is what their religious traditions and laws required. “Let no man talk with a woman in the streets, even with his wife, much less with another man’s wife.”

These disciples presumed that what they saw was something evil. Their “moral uprightness” made them sensitive to such things. For a preacher (teacher, rabbi, scholar, doctor of the law) to be seen talking to a woman was abhorrent. John Gill tells us, “This is one of the six things which (were considered) a reproach to a scholar, ‘to talk with a woman in the streets.’ And it is even said ‘Let him not talk with a woman in the street, though she is his wife, or his sister, or his daughter.’”

The fact that this woman was a Samaritan only made a bad situation look worse in their eyes. *“Yet no man said,”* (not even Peter, who was never known for biting his tongue, openly asked the Master), *“What seekest thou? or Why talkest thou with her?”*

I have said all that to say this: — We need to be constantly on guard. Let us not only bridle our tongues, but also our thoughts. We ought to always put the best construction possible on the actions of others. Don't ever presume that you know what is going on with people. It may be that they are not quite as perverted as you are. As John Trapp put it, "All ill thoughts and sinister surmises are to be suppressed and strangled at birth." This is exactly what our Lord Jesus teaches us in Matthew 7:1-2.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

The long and short of that is this: — We should never interpret the actions of another suspiciously. — Love is not suspicious. It does not behave itself unseemly. Religion and self-righteousness makes people suspicious and spreads gossip. Love hopes for the best, believes the best, and says the best.

Mission Accomplished

"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him." (John 4:28-30)

The Lord Jesus had achieved his purpose in coming to Samaria. He always does! He had come to save a poor sinner; and it was done.

How embarrassed the disciples must have been when they found out what had really taken place. This poor sinner had come to the well a fallen child of Adam. She went back to the city rejoicing in the second Adam. She came out to the well concerned only about mundane, carnal things, water to temporarily quench her thirst. She went back with the water of life, springing up like an artesian well of life in her soul. She came out of the city foul with sin, beaten with guilt, ashamed. She went home washed, justified, and sanctified in Christ. She came down corrupt. She went back consecrated. She came out condemned. She went back free. I can almost hear her singing...

Now I am free, there's no condemnation!
Jesus gave me His perfect salvation.
"Come unto me," I heard His sweet call;
And now He has saved me, once for all!

She came out of the city of Sychar having had five husbands, which were not husbands. She went home with one Husband who is a Husband indeed, faithful and true. This Samaritan woman was converted by the revelation of Christ to her and in her; and the evidences of her conversion are obvious.

Must be Converted

We, too, must be converted. Conversion is always the result of the new birth, the fruit of grace. There is no salvation without it (Matthew 18:3; Jeremiah 31:19; Acts 3:19).

Have you ever thought about the great, drastic changes that take place in a new born child, radical changes, but changes that take place in the matter of just a few seconds? When a child is brought forth out of its mother's womb, eyes which have been in complete darkness before begin to see light; a body which has been snuggled up in a cozy, warm room at nearly 100 degrees, comes into a cold, cold world and must adapt to temperatures 25 or 30 degrees cooler; the umbilical cord, through which its life's blood has always flowed, is cut; a specific valve in the child's heart that had to be open in the womb must permanently shut itself by God's design, so that the used blood and fresh blood circulating through the heart do not mix; and the lungs fill with

air and begin their lifelong function. Dozens of changes take place instantly. The nose, the throat, the digestive system, even the skin goes through great changes, all of which are necessary if the child is to live and be healthy.

As it is in the birth of a child, so it is in the new birth. There are changes which must and always do take place in the life of one who is born of God. These changes are evident in the Samaritan woman. There are four things revealed in these verses about this woman to which I want to direct your attention , four marks¹ of true conversion.

A Public Confession

The first thing that is obvious in this passage is the fact that this woman made a public confession of Christ. The very first thing a doctor or nurse does after a baby is delivered is slap it on the bottom to make it cry. The cry of the child is indication that the child is breathing. In the new birth, the first indication of life, the first indication that the soul is breathing before God is the cry of new life, confessing Christ before men. — Life is breathing before God. We commonly call this the “cry of faith”, or “prayer.” The indication of this before men is the believer’s public confession of Christ.

Do you not hear this in the Samaritan woman? She said to her neighbors, “*Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*”

Salvation does not come by confessing Christ before men. But it must never be imagined that a public confession of Christ is an optional thing. Our Lord tells us plainly that we must confess him before men; and believers gladly do so (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10). Secret disciples are always suspect disciples. The believer’s confession of Christ is done once, by the solemn ordinance of believer’s baptism (Romans 6:1-6).

Our confession of Christ is also a verbal thing. I am not talking about a show of piety. I am talking about the natural result of grace in the heart. Grace experienced, Christ revealed makes us love him who first loved us (1 John 4:19). And believers delight to talk about him whom they love. We do so as naturally as a husband talks about his wife, or a grandmother talks about her grandchild.

A Positive Change

This woman’s conversion was more than lip service. It was more than a confession of Christ; it was a confession enforced and backed up by a positive change. We read in verse 28 — “*The woman left her water pot!*” She now had better things in her heart and greater concerns to look after. Having now the water of life in her soul, she became oblivious to that which others thought absolutely essential, to that which she thought absolutely essential just a short time before. Pastor Henry Mahan wrote...

“She had come to the well with one thing on her mind — a pot of water; but now she had met Christ, tasted the living water and was so taken with him that she not only forgot the water she had come for, but left even her water pot. Once there is a clear perception of Christ to the heart, once he is revealed, known, and received as Lord and Savior, the things of this world do not seem so important.”

As we read the New Testament, we see this same thing in the lives of others. The disciples left their nets, their business, their friends, and all for Christ. So, too, believers are brought to leave their earthly and

¹ Marks of conversion are not proof of conversion. You may have many marks of conversion without conversion; but you cannot be converted and not be changed, changed inwardly and outwardly. “Conversion,” wrote *Joseph Alliene*, “is a deep work — a heart work. It goes throughout the man, throughout the mind, throughout the members, throughout the entire life.”

worldly things for the sake of Christ, his gospel, his church, his kingdom, and his glory. In a word, like this Samaritan woman, saved sinners, being risen with Christ set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:1-3).

A Personal Concern

Here is another indication of this woman's conversion. Once she met the Savior, she showed a personal concern for others to know him. Up to this point in her life, like all other people, she was concerned for herself. Previously she had known many, and known them only too well, but had never done anyone any good. She had given many pleasure; but she had done them no good. She used them; and they used her. Now, she was concerned for their souls. Her first thought seems to have been, "I've got to tell others about the Savior. I've got to make him known." We read here that...

"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

Andrew and Philip, when they had found Christ themselves, told others about him and brought them to him. Levi (Matthew), the publican, once he was called by Christ, made a feast for Christ and invited many publicans and sinners to sit down with him, that they might know him as well. The Apostle Paul, once he was converted, expressed a great concern for his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh. He wanted others to know the Savior. Such is the nature of true grace. Those who have it want to share it. Those who know Christ want others to know him, too.

In 1866, there was a Welshman by the name of Robert J. Thomas working in China as a colporteur (a Bible and book distributor) with the Scottish Bible Society. But he had a great burden to carry the gospel into Korea. He boarded an American ship, the *General Sherman*, sailed from China to Pyong-yang, a large city in the northern part of Korea. As the ship neared the harbor, it was attacked by the Koreans and burned at sea. The crew and all the passengers were killed. As the ship and all aboard were sinking, Robert Thomas managed to make it to the shore. He struggled up out of the sea onto the shore with his arms filled with books. They were Bibles. He thrust the Bibles into the hands of the Koreans on shore, as they clubbed him to death.

Why? He had met the Savior. He had tasted grace. Robert J. Thomas had the same overwhelming, life controlling fire in his soul that the Samaritan woman had. It is what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:10-15.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to *answer* them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God: or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

A Passionate Call

This saved sinner went home to those she knew with a passionate call. — "*Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*" There was nothing half-hearted about her call. She did not say go, but "Come," and led them out to the Savior. — "*Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.*" This is the concern of every saved sinner. Saved sinners want others like themselves to come to Christ (Psalm 46:8; Isaiah

1:18). Following the example of Christ himself (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17), we call sinners to the Savior. Come, O sinner, come and welcome to the Savior! As Joseph Hart put it...

“Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity joined with power:
He is able, He is able,
He is willing; doubt no more.

Come, ye needy, come and welcome,
God’s free bounty, glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.
Without money, without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and broken by the fall;
If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all:
Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him;
This He gives you, this He gives you;
‘Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.

Lo! Th’ incarnate God, ascended,
Pleads the merit of His blood;
Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude.
None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good.

I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms.
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O there are ten thousand charms!

Come to Christ and live forever! O Spirit of God turn the hearts of poor needy sinners to Christ, by your almighty grace.

Two Great Soul Winners

“Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” (John 4:30)

We do not hear much about soul winning these days. In fact, I do not recall ever hearing a sermon by a gospel preacher on the subject. In gospel churches, we tend to think of soul winning as an evil thing and of soul winners as ignorant Arminians. Yet, we read in Proverbs 11:30, “*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth souls is wise.*”

In John chapter 4 we are given a beautifully instructive picture of the soul winner. Actually, we see two great soul winners in the chapter. First, our Lord Jesus Christ came to Samaria as the great soul winner, seeking a lost soul. Then, the sinner to whom he revealed himself immediately became a soul winner herself. Let me show you.

“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? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” (John 4:27-30)

Are you concerned about the souls of men? Are you interested in the salvation of sinners for the glory of God? Would you like to be used of God for the everlasting salvation of others?

If you have yourself experienced the grace of God in Christ, if you have found for yourself that the Lord is gracious, if you have experienced the love of God in your own soul, I know that your answer is “yes”. You know that your family, friends, neighbors, and most implacable enemies need the Savior. “*The one thing needful*” is Christ; and you know it. You want to lead others to him. Is that not so? Would you not count it your highest honor and most distinct privilege to bring a lost soul to the Son of God? Is there any believer who does not long for this? I am sure there are none.

The thing that hinders you is, perhaps, a great concern for the glory of God and the truth of God. You want to be useful to the souls of men, but you do not know how to go about the work in a manner that is consistent with the gospel of Christ. You do not want to say or do anything that would dishonor our God. And all you have ever heard about soul-winning has come from will worshippers, who are soul destroyers, not soul winners.

How many times have you asked yourself, “How can I show the kid next door that he needs Christ?” — “How can I get my friend interested in hearing the gospel?” — “How can I minister to my mechanic?” — “What words should I use to talk about Christ to my wife, husband, son or daughter?” — “How can I minister to my neighbor?”

It is the privilege and responsibility of every saved sinner to seek the salvation of other sinners.

A Tree of Life

All who are born of God ought to be soul winners (Proverbs 11:28, 30). Some may think, “That is strange language for one who preaches and teaches election, predestination, limited atonement, and divine sovereignty.” If you have such thoughts, you do not yet understand the glorious gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. Hear the words of Solomon. — “*He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch...The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*” (Proverbs 11:28, 30).

In those two verses God's saints are described as both "*a flourishing branch*" (a fruitful branch — John 15) and "*a tree of life.*" In the whole course of his life, — his prayers, his instruction, his example, and his influence, — in the whole course of his life, the believer is "*a tree of life.*" What the tree of life was in the garden and is in glory,¹ every child of God is in this wilderness:

- A Fruitful Tree (Revelation 22:2; Proverbs 10:11, 31, 32).
- A Nourishing Tree (Revelation 2:7; Proverbs 10:21).
- A Healing Tree (Proverbs 12:18; 15:4).

Without question, none but Christ can win lost souls to himself. I am fully aware of that fact, and rejoice in it. "He only," wrote Charles Bridges, "who purchased them by his blood, can win them to himself." It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and himself alone, who calls dead sinners to life by the sovereign power and omnipotent, irresistible grace of his Holy Spirit. He gives eternal life to whom he will. Repentance is a gift only he can give.

Yet, he has chosen, in great grace and condescending mercy, to use saved sinners to draw lost sinners to himself (Ephesians 3:8). This is mercy, indeed. If Christ is made of God unto us Wisdom, then he has made us wise; and the wise man here declares, "*He that winneth souls is wise.*"

This is our Lord's great commission to his church (Matthew 28:19-20). The risen Christ has given each of us our marching orders. They are crystal clear. These orders are for every gospel church as a unit and for every believer as an individual. The souls of men are our business. Let us ever be about our Savior's business. The righteous wife must seek to win her lost husband by living with him and before him in meekness and sobriety, reverencing him as her husband (1 Peter 3:1-2). The believing neighbor seeks to win his unbelieving neighbor by the prayer of faith and work of love (James 5:19-20). No one in this world, and especially none in the kingdom of God, "*liveth unto himself*" (Romans 14:7). We all influence multitudes, either for good or for evil. If we are wise, we will seek by the grace of God to influence all around us for good, for the everlasting good of their immortal souls.

This is my prayer, every time I go into the home of another eternity bound sinner, or have a little time with another soul, which I must soon meet before the bar of God: — "Lord God, give me grace to influence this home, or this person for good, for eternal good."

If we would indeed win souls to the Savior, we must have wisdom from above. The fact is, souls are hard to be won. Their wills must be conquered. Their prejudices must be overcome. Their thoughts must be changed. In a word, the work is impossible, unless he who is Wisdom both makes us wise and uses us for the salvation of others. Our labor is never in vain in the Lord; but it is nothing but vanity without him.

Still, it is our responsibility, great honor, and high privilege to engage in this work of winning souls. No work is so great and no reward so glorious as that which belongs to the wise who win souls to the Savior (Daniel 12:3). Every soul won is a jewel for the Savior's crown, a polished stone in his temple, a cause for joy in heaven, and a satisfaction for his soul's travail. May God give us grace to give ourselves to this business. May God give us wisdom and make us winners of souls, for the glory of Christ. For us to neglect this great work would be the height of selfish ingratitude (1 Corinthians 9:20-22; 10:31-33).

Christ the Soul Winner

¹ I do not know what the tree of life was in the garden; but the tree of life in glory is Christ himself; and it is Christ whom we are to imitate.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself is held before us in this chapter as the great, wise Soul Winner. We read in verse four, *“And he must needs go through Samaria.”* Why must he go through Samaria? The answer is given in verses 32 and 34. — *“But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.”* — In verse 34, we read, *“Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”*

In this chapter we see the Son of God, with skillful art, gracious patience, infinite love, and divine wisdom, seeking a single soul. In private, without any fanfare, without calling attention to himself in any way, he quietly, diligently went about his Father’s business, seeking a lost sinner.

“His disciples marveled that he talked with the woman.” – They seem to have forgotten who they were, what they were, and where they were when the Savior found them. Let us not be guilty of such forgetfulness (Isaiah 51:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). I, too, marvel, O Lord, not that you talked with this sinner, but that you choose to speak in grace to any sinner, especially to this sinner! Oh, how we marvel that you came here to save sinners, such as we are, by your precious blood, your perfect righteousness, and your matchless grace!

Yet, here the Son of God is set before us as the model, exemplary soul winner. If we would win souls, let us learn the wisdom of the art from the Master Soul Winner. Let me show you five things our Master did as he sought the salvation of this needy sinner. If we would be useful in this blessed business of winning lost sinners to the Savior, we would be wise to seek grace from God the Holy Ghost to follow his example.

1. He befriended a sinner. He went to where she was, and treated her as a friend (vv. 4-6).

The Lord Jesus constantly showed himself the friend of sinners. He went to the lost, the lonely, the distressed, the fallen, the perishing, the needy, the desperate, and walked among them as a friend. More than that, the holy Son of God made the most unholy of men and women perfectly comfortable in his company. He was and is the Friend of sinners!

2. The Lord Jesus got this sinner engaged in a conversation by asking her questions, questions about something in which she had an obvious interest.

She had a water pitcher. She had come to the well. It might, therefore, be reasonably assumed that she was interested in water. So, the Master got her talking about water. He asked her for a drink of water.

Looking at this as an outside observer, it might seem a bit amusing. She was the one in need. He had come to her aid. But he asked her to do something for him. He humbled himself, that he might put himself in immediate contact with her, and compel her to give him her attention. He got her talking. The voice most people like to hear best is their own. So the Lord got this woman in a talking mood. He aroused her curiosity. No doubt, as they talked, the Samaritan woman must have begun to think, — *“What an interesting man this is. How polite. How genuine.”*

3. The Savior talked about something relevant to the woman.

It is completely useless to try to talk to people about things about which they have absolutely no interest. Of course, our Master had something on his mind other than what she perceived, and was resolved to direct her attention by the conversation; but he talked to her about water.

Nicodemus asked him about the new birth. So the Savior talked to him about new life, a new beginning (John 3:3-7). To the man who was born blind, he talked about light, and made himself known as the Light of the world (John 9:5). To this Samaritan woman, he talked about water. He talked about her needs, needs which she (in some sense) knew she had – water (vv. 13-14).

4. Notice, also, that the Lord Jesus stressed the good news.

Yes, he dealt with sin. Yes, he taught her the truth about the character of God and the necessity of worshipping God in spirit and in truth. But he never got side tracked. He never got entangled with other issues. He never let her draw him into debate and argument about their different religious sects, doctrines, or practices. He had come to communicate to her the water of life. That is what he talked about – WATER — Living Water — Refreshing Water — Cleansing Water — Thirst Quenching Water — Everlasting Water.

5. Then, the Master pressed this woman for a decision.

When she finally brought up the subject of the Messiah, whom she had been taught must come, the Master said, “*I am he.*” With those words, she was forced to make a decision, either to believe his claims or to deny them. She must either bow to or rebel against the revelation of God (1 John 5:7-13).

What happened? The woman believed the testimony of God. She said, “*Is not this the Christ?*” And she became a witness to the people around her.

Another Soul Winner

Once the Lord saved her, this saved sinner went about the work of wisdom as a soul winner (John 4:28-30).

“The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.”

This saved sinner became a messenger of Christ. She went to the men of the city. The Master had said to her, “*Go call thy husband, and come again.*” But he did not tell her which husband to call. So she called them all. Since they were all apparently mixed in the crowd, the crowd heard her. — “*Then went out the men of the city, and came unto him.*”

She left her water pot. She seems to have simply forgotten it, being utterly absorbed with something more important — The Lord Jesus Christ and the Water of Life found in him! She went to call sinners to the Savior. I can almost hear her passionate, persuasive calls. — “*Come, see a man.*” — “*Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did.*” — “*Is not this the Christ?*” — Come and see!

She told others what the Savior had done for her. That’s called witnessing (Mark 5:18-20). The Samaritan woman told all who would hear her “*how great things Jesus had done for*” her. How he revealed her to herself, revealed himself to her, and graciously received her. Her testimony to those around her was very simple, forthright, and clear. — Since he has received me as I am, surely, he will receive you, too!

Charlotte Elliott

More than 150 years ago, there was a woman in England, who had heard the gospel all her life. She was raised in a godly home. Her brother was a preacher. But she had become an invalid before she was 33 years old; and she was angry. She was mad at God and hostile with her family, filled with anger.

One day, sitting in a church service, filled with mixed feelings of anger and despair, fightings and fears, she heard an old, old man preach the gospel. Right in the middle of the service, the preacher paused, seemed to point his finger directly at her, and said, “You, miss, sitting there in the back, you can be saved right now. You don’t need to do anything.”

His words were barbed arrows, shot from the bow of God to her heart. She believed the gospel. The peace of God flooded her soul. That night, *Charlotte Elliott* wrote these words...

“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears, within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind, —
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yes, all I need in Thee to find, —
O Lamb of God I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God I come.”

The Rarest of All Jewels

“In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *ought* to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:31-34)

The rarest of all jewels must be the jewel of contentment. Everyone wants it; but few, very few possess it. What would you give to have real, lasting contentment and satisfaction? What would you give, if you could say with honesty, “I have enough”?

There is no contentment to be found in this world. There is nothing here that can satisfy one created for eternity. All who drink from the wells of the earth shall thirst again. All who eat the bread of this world shall hunger for more bread. But there is a well with water which will quench the thirst of your soul. There is a bread, which once eaten, will satisfy the deepest cravings of our immortal souls.

I pray that the Lord God will cause you this day to eat of that bread and drink of that water, that you may find satisfaction in your soul, that your conversation may be without covetousness, that you may be “*content with such things as ye have*” (Hebrews 13:5). In these few verses of Inspiration God the Holy Ghost shows us the rarest of all jewels. Holding the Lord Jesus Christ before us as our example, he here teaches us the secret of contentment, the secret to satisfaction.

The disciples had been away buying groceries. When they returned from town and tried to get the Master to eat, he said to them, “*I have meat to eat that ye know not of...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*” What does that mean? What is our Lord telling us here? He is telling us that satisfaction, contentment of soul, is found in doing the will of God.

If you are yet without Christ, if you are yet living in rebellion to God, in rebellion to your own conscience, in defiance of the Almighty, you will never find peace and satisfaction, until you bow to Christ, until you are reconciled to God, until you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are a believer, if you are a child of God, and still you struggle with this matter of peace, contentment, and satisfaction in your soul, the problem is your rebellion to the will of God.

I do not mean to suggest that knowing and doing the will of God will give you perfect peace, complete contentment and total satisfaction in this world. It will not. It will not, because we simply cannot do God’s will perfectly, so long as we live in this body of flesh. But I do say this — If you are a child of God, you are here for a reason. God has a purpose for you to serve, a job for you to do. And the only way you will ever find contentment, peace, and satisfaction in this world is to find out what God’s will is and do it with all your might. Doing what God put you here to do will give you satisfaction.

An Encouragement for Sinner

Here is an encouragement for sinners. The Lord Jesus declares, “*I have meat to eat that ye know not of...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*” I cannot imagine a more comforting word for you if you are anxious about your soul, or a more encouraging word to you if you long for God’s saving mercy and grace in Christ.

Our Lord Jesus had been seeking the salvation of one lost sinner. Once he had obtained the thing he sought, he said, "Do you see this saved sinner? This is my Father's will; this is the meat by which I am satisfied." Is that not what we see in his words?

Our Lord Jesus Christ here declares that the salvation of sinners is his Father's will. — Sometimes people get the idea that God the Father is an austere judge, a tyrant who delights in wrath, and is bent upon the destruction of men's souls. Nothing could be further from the truth. True it is that judgment is his work; but it is his strange work. It is true that God must and will punish sin; but "*he delighteth in mercy!*"

The Lord Jesus did not come here to make God merciful. He came because God is merciful. He came to make it possible for God to show mercy to sinners while maintaining strict righteousness and justice. Christ did not die to get God the Father to be gracious. Christ died because God is gracious. He did not come to get God to love, but because "*God is love*" (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10). As John Kent put it in one of his great hymns...

"'Twas not to make Jehovah's love
Towards the sinner flame,
That Jesus, from his throne above,
A suffering man became.

`Twas not the death which he endured,
Nor all the pangs he bore,
That God's eternal love procured,
For God was love before.

He loved the world of His elect
With love surpassing thought;
Nor will His mercy e'er neglect
The souls so dearly bought.

The warm affections of His breast
Towards His chosen burn;
And in His love He'll ever rest,
Nor from His oath return.

Still to confirm His oath of old,
See in the heav'ns His bow;
No fierce rebukes, but love untold
Awaits His children now.

Soon shall my spirit realize
That sacred, joyful scene,
When all His saints, above the skies,
Shall round His throne convene!"

If you get into the kingdom of God's dear Son, you will not come in as an intruder, but as a welcome guest. The gate of mercy is open. God himself opened it. If you get God's salvation, it is because he gives it to you. If you obtain the treasure of heaven, you will obtain it because God himself has made you his heir.

If ever you come to Christ, if ever you trust the Son of God, if ever you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you need not concern yourself about having violated God's decrees, overturned his purpose, or defying

predestination and election. If you trust Christ, it is God's will that you trust him. He chose you to salvation. He predestinated you to be numbered among his sons and daughters. He called you by his Spirit. You were purchased by Christ's blood at Calvary. If ever you are saved, it will be because God the Father willed it. He willed it because he loved you with an everlasting love from which he can never be turned.

One of the most absurd fears a sinner ever entertained is the fear that he might believe on the Son of God and not be numbered among the elect. I rejoice to preach the glorious gospel doctrine of God's grace and glory in Christ. Electing love, absolute predestination, effectual atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints are all great, God honoring, gospel doctrines, plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. But they are misunderstood and abused by many who would make them appear contrary to mercy. If these great truths appear to you to contradict the fact that the God of Glory, the Triune Jehovah "*delighteth in mercy,*" you do not understand them. All these things are true precisely because "*He delighteth in mercy*"

Be sure you understand what the Book of God emphatically and universally teaches in this regard. If you desire Christ, he desired you from eternity. If you want him, he wants you. If you are hungry for him, he is the Bread of life to you. If you thirst for him, he is to you a Fountain of living Water, springing up into everlasting life for you. There is no secret decree by which God forbids you to believe on his dear Son. He has not said, in some secret, hidden place, "*Seek ye me in vain.*" His word is plain and clear. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*"

Not only is the salvation of sinners the Father's will, but the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world specifically for the purpose of saving sinners (Matthew 1:21; 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; 1 Timothy 1:15). If Christ came to save sinners, there is no question about it, he came to save me. I qualify for his salvation, for I am a sinner. Why should I stand around and debate in my own mind or with anyone else as to whether or not he came to save me. A sick man is not reluctant to go to any physician. A poor, hungry man will not hesitate to go to a soup kitchen. A thirsty man will not pause before a bubbling well to see if it has his name upon it. Why should a sinner be reluctant about trusting Christ?

Not only is the salvation of sinners the will of God and the reason for Christ's coming, but our Savior here declares that the great work of saving sinners is that in which he experiences the greatest delight and satisfaction. It is his meat and drink. From old eternity, he looked forward to the day when a body would be prepared for him, that he might come into the world and redeem his people from their sins. When the fulness of time was come, he ran to the work, as an eager volunteer (Hebrews 10:5-9). While he walked through this world, he was always busy about his Father's business, seeking out lost sinners.

It was alleged of him, "*This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them!*" And, blessed be his name, the allegation is true! He could have healed the leper by the mere word of his mouth, or exercise of his will, as he did the centurion's daughter. But, instead, he laid his hand on the polluted leper to let us know that he has come to be one of us, to make himself what we are, that he might make us what he is. He came here that he might be made sin, to die the just for the unjust, that he might make us the righteousness of God in him and take us to glory. Can you grasp this? — The Lord Jesus Christ is a willing Savior, the willing Savior of helpless, ruined, lost, doomed, damned, vile sinners. His soul's delight is the salvation of sinners.

Yet, that great crowning work, the work for which all things were made, his work of suffering and death as the sinner's Substitute, that work by which our souls were effectually redeemed, was, at the same time, his greatest sorrow and agony and his greatest delight and satisfaction. This was the baptism with which he must be baptized; and he was straitened until he was immersed in it. This was the bitter cup he must drink; but he longed to drink it. Did he not say to his disciples, "*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*"? Even in his deepest agony, our blessed Christ had a joy before him, a joy which sustained and satisfied his holy soul, overflowing with infinite love for needy sinners. That joy set before him was and is the satisfaction of his soul in the salvation of his elect (Isaiah 53:9-11; Hebrews 12:2).

Now that he is seated upon the high throne of heaven, it is still the great delight of the Lord Jesus Christ to save sinners. If you would be saved, look away to Christ. Salvation comes by looking to Christ. Looking at your sin and hardness of heart will only drive you to despair. Look to Christ and be melted in repentance (Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 45:22).

Peace, joy, contentment, and satisfaction come to sinners only as we look to Christ. This is the will of God revealed in the Book of God. — *“This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ.”* John 4:31-34 stands, first and foremost, as an encouragement for sinners. The salvation of poor, needy sinners is the will of God the Father and the work and joy of God the Son, by which he is satisfied and filled with contentment.

An Example for Saints

Here we also have an example for saints. When our Master said, *“I have meat to eat that ye know not of... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work,”* he set before us an example to be followed. That which gave him contentment and satisfaction on earth as a man is the thing that will give us contentment and satisfaction in this world.

If you and I are struggling with frustration, failure, doubts, fears, inadequacies, and a general sense of uselessness, it is because we are having a problem with one of the five things here exemplified in Christ. If we would have peace and satisfaction in this world, we must seek to imitate our Master in these areas.

1. The Lord Jesus always made his will subservient to his Father’s will.

Our Savior did not come to do his will, but the will of him that sent him. In all things, he said, *“Not my will, thy will be done.”* All our sorrows in this world spring from the root of self-will. If my will was totally subservient to my Father’s will, my Father’s will would always please me. Pain would have a wonderful comfort to my soul, if I did not kick so hard against it. Losses would enrich me, if I were not so covetous. Bitterness would have a wonderful sweetness, if I did not crave my own will and my own way.

2. Our Lord Jesus lived in great peace and contentment, because he always knew why he was here.

He lived with a sense of urgency, pressed with great responsibility, because he knew why the Father had sent him into the world. He came on a mission, with a commission from God, as the Servant of God. He came to save his people, to build his kingdom, for the glory of God. And if we are Christ’s, we are God’s servants, and his mission is our mission. His commission is our commission. His work is our work. The will of God for him, is the will of God for us (John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; 26:13-18).

3. Our Savior’s contentment and satisfaction in this world was found in doing the Father’s will.

He said, *“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.”* Again, he said, *“I do always those things that please him”* (John 8:29). You will never find satisfaction in talking about God’s will. And you will never obtain peace by debating God’s will, God’s Word, or God’s work. The Lord Jesus found his meat, his soul’s food, in doing his Father’s will.

I am convinced that the vast majority of what people call “depression” arises from a lack of meaningful responsibility. I have known very, very few people in my life who were engaged in work which they perceived as meaningful, whose hands were full with a weight of responsibility, who struggled greatly with depression. I am neither a doctor, nor a psychiatrist or psychologist. So I will leave it to them to deal with such things. But I know this — Spiritual trouble, depression, and incessant doubtings and fears only overwhelm those who have

nothing better to think about than themselves. Full hearts and full hands have no room for such worthless lumber.

Find me a person full of questions, and I will show you a person doing nothing. Find me a person constantly struggling with doubts and fears, and I will show you a person who serves no useful purpose in ministering to the souls of others. Find me a preacher who is forever in doubt of his calling, and I will show you one who should be, because he is not engaged in the work, but loitering about. Find me one who is forever questioning his election, whether or not he trusts Christ, whether he loves the Lord or no, and I will show you one who spends too much of his time thinking about himself, and too little serving the needs of others.

4. Our Redeemer's peace, contentment, and satisfaction came by his perseverance in doing his Father's will.

He was not content to do the will of God a day or two, or a year or two. He was resolved to do it until he had finished it. He said, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish the work.*" — It was this same confidence and satisfaction which sustained the apostle Paul as he came to the end of his day (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Let it be the satisfaction of our souls to do the will of God until we have finished our course.

5. The Lord Jesus made his will subservient to his Father's will, knew why he was here, knew what his Father's will was, did the Father's will, persevered in doing the Father's will until it was done, and he did what God gave him to do with all his might, for the glory of God (John 12:27-28).

Thank you, O my Savior, for doing the will of God and finishing his works for us. Give me grace, blessed Redeemer, to follow your example, doing my Father's will until I have finished the work for which you have sent me into this world (Ecclesiastes 9:10; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 2:21-25). O Holy Spirit, make the will of God my meat and my drink. With Job of old, let me esteem my Father's will more than my necessary food (Job 23:12). Then, only then, can I possess this, the rarest of all jewels — Contentment. When my will is one with his will, I shall be satisfied, not until then. That is the mark toward which I press. May God give us grace to press on. Then shall we be satisfied, when we awake in his likeness.

Reaping Where Others Labored Laboring for Others to Reap

“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. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.” (John 4:35-38)

Here are biblical motives for missions and evangelism. Any time men and women are called upon to do something unusual, to make sacrifices for a cause, they must have something to motivate them. I call upon all who are God’s elect to devote their lives to the cause of Christ, to devote everything God has put in your hands to the furtherance of the gospel, the salvation of God’s elect and the building of Christ’s kingdom, and I call upon myself to do the same, because this is the only opportunity we have to do so.

Here in John 4:35-38, our Savior tells us that one great motive for all evangelistic, missionary endeavor is just this – The time is now. This is the time of opportunity. The Master here tells us that we are never to think or act as if there is some future time for evangelization. He says, “*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.*”

I call upon all who have experienced the mercy, love, and grace of God in Christ to devote themselves anew to the business of preaching the gospel. Let us indeed be his witnesses at home and abroad. Let us, like David of old (Acts 13:36), serve our generation according to the will of God. This is our mission. This is the calling, vocation, and life work of every child of God in this world. The Lord our God has left us here to serve this one purpose. He has left us here to preach the gospel, to make Christ known in the generation in which we live.

The Reasons

First, let me show you the reasons given in Holy Scripture for this great work. Without question, there are many, many more reasons and motives for evangelism and missions than I can give here. I have had to limit myself to just a few of the most prominent. But, after much thoughtful, prayerful consideration, I have selected seven noble reasons for this great work. Here are seven things which should constantly motivate us in the work God has given us to do.

1. **The Glory of God** — “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*” (1 Corinthians 10:31)
2. **The Great Commission** — We have our orders from our Commander-in-Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ. The orders are crystal clear, we are, everyone of us who are born of God, to go forth into all the world preaching the gospel. These orders are given numerous times, in one way or another, through the Scriptures. But they are specifically recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Book of Acts. In each place the emphasis is different; but the orders are the same. Matthew emphasizes the authority of Christ as Lord and King. — “*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the gospel*” (Matthew 28:19-20). Mark’s emphasis is the wrath of God and salvation from it (Mark 16:15-16). Luke presents the great commission as the fulfilling of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:44-49). In John’s account, the Savior’s commission is given to us in connection with his own commission from the Father. — “*As my Father hath sent me into the world, so*

send I you” (John 20:21). In the Book of Acts, the great commission is specifically stated as the program and purpose of Christ’s church and kingdom in this world (Acts 1:8).

3. **The Wrath of God** — All who are without Christ are lost and under the wrath of God (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). All who are ignorant of God, ignorant of Christ, ignorant of the gospel are perishing. Our sons and daughters are going to hell! Our mothers and fathers are about to meet an angry God in judgment! Our neighbors and friends are under the wrath of God! The world around us is perishing! Let us love our enemies and do good to those who spitefully use us, just as we do our own families, doing the most compassionate thing we possibly can for them. Preach the gospel to them.
4. **The Love of Christ** — *“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
5. **The Opportunity We Have** — *“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)

We ought to be motivated in the work of preaching the gospel by the opportunity which each succeeding day thrusts upon us. Do you recall our Lord’s promise, when he gave the commission? He said, *“Lo! I am with you alway!”* He promised us his presence; and it is his presence with us which gives us the opportunity. It is Christ’s presence that makes our opportunities. It is his presence which opens doors of utterance for the gospel, and makes them effectual.

The Master speaks here in a parabolic manner. It is common for men to plow a field and sow their seed and then wait for the harvest. But our Lord here tells us that in the work of the gospel, we must never labor with the notion that the harvest is for another day. Rather, we are to labor in his vineyard in the expectation of an immediate harvest, because we are reapers where others have sowed, and others will reap where we sow sheaves of harvests gathered from seed sown by someone else.

We cast our bread upon the waters, knowing that it shall return in due time; but while we are casting, the bread cast by someone else is returning. We go forth in the morning scattering the precious seed of the gospel, with weeping hearts; but we go forth with the joyful prospect of coming back in the evening bearing our sheaves of harvest. This is exactly what was promised in the Old Testament prophecies of this gospel age, when Messiah is present upon his throne in his Kingdom (Leviticus 26:5; Psalm 126:5-6; Amos 9:13).

6. **The Election of Grace** — The purpose of God in election and predestination assures us that our labor in the Lord is not and cannot be in vain. The apostle Paul frequently referred to God’s purpose of grace in election as his motive in preaching (2 Timothy 1:1, 8-12; Titus 1:1-3).
7. **The Honor of Service** — Oh, what an honor it is that God has put the great treasure of his gospel in such earthen vessels as we are, and uses such things as we are to tell others about his wondrous, matchless, free and saving grace in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

The Rewards

Second, in verse 36, our Lord speaks plainly about the rewards which shall be given to those who serve the interests of his kingdom, to those who serve the souls of men for the glory of God by the gospel. — *“And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”*

The wages we shall receive are the souls of men. — “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*” (1 Thessalonians 2:19) And the fruit we gather is everlasting. Ours is no ordinary work. Ours is not a labor of temporary significance. Oh, no! The fruit we gather is “*unto life eternal.*” Yes, what we are doing is of everlasting importance to the souls of men and of everlasting importance to the glory of the Triune God!

The Reapers

Third, observe what our Lord tells us about the reapers in verse 36-38.

“And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.”

Our Savior here tells us several things we need to always bear in mind: (1.) All God’s servants are one. (2.) It matters not whether we sow or reap. Actually, all who sow do some reaping, and all who reap do some sowing. (3.) He who sows and he who reaps are alike insignificant. — God gives the increase!

I cannot speak for anyone else, but I consider myself a debtor. I have the medicine a dying world needs. Were I to keep it to myself, I would be guilty of the highest crime imaginable, the everlasting ruin of immortal souls!

“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:14-17)

Read our Lord’s words again, asking God the Holy Ghost to apply them to your own heart by his grace.

“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. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.”

O my soul, let it never be said of me, “*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and thou art not saved*” (Jeremiah 8:20). As in nature, there is a seed time and harvest, so it is in grace. And we are told, that the Lord has given “*the appointed weeks of harvest*” (Jeremiah 5:24).

As the wheat ripens, it becomes more golden and weighty. The fuller and riper the grain, the more it bends toward the earth. So it is with the child of God. As he grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ, he is ripened for the garner of heaven. The more he is filled with spiritual life, the lower he becomes in his own eyes; and Christ Jesus is increasingly precious and exalted. And when the Lord signals that it is his harvest-time, the believing sinner comes to the grave “*like a shock of corn in his season*” (Job 5:26).

Blessed Savior, Lord of the harvest, carry on your work of grace in my heart; and let your gospel ever abide in my heart as good seed cast into ground made good by your grace, springing up, growing and fruitful! Oh, prepare me for the harvest! When you put forth your sickle, let me be gathered into your garner in heaven!

Because of the Woman

“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. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (John 4:39-42)

Have you ever paused to consider the things revealed in the Book of God that have come to pass because of a woman? Adam, of course, blamed the fall on the woman God gave him. And the Scriptures tell us about many Jezebels and Salomes, by whom Satan has attempted to thwart the gracious purposes of God. But have you ever thought about the fact that there would be no such thing as eternal salvation, were it not for women? — God forbids women to speak in the church. The New Testament strictly prohibits female preachers, deaconesses, and such. Women are not to teach or usurp authority over men in the house of God. But that does not mean God does not use women for the furtherance of the gospel and the salvation of his elect.

The fact is, no one would be saved, were it not for the many things God has done by the use of women. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Seed of woman, the Seed promised to Eve in the Garden. The Lion of the tribe of Judah came into this world because Judah’s daughter-in-law, Tamar, believed God. It was a woman by the name of Rahab who brought God’s Israel into the land of promise and preserved the elect nation. The Lord God raised up a woman named Deborah (a prophetess, a worshipper of God) to deliver Israel from the hand of Jabin, the King of Canaan. It was another woman, Jael, the wife of Heber, who nailed Sisera’s head to the ground. It was by the faith of Ruth the Moabitess that the seed royal was preserved in a day when few believed God. And, of course, the Son of God came in the flesh through Mary’s virgin womb.

Here, in the 4th chapter of John’s gospel, God the Holy Ghost tells us how God saved a great multitude of Samaritans because of the testimony of a woman. He tells us that “*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.*”

God’s Gift

Faith in Christ is both the requirement of God and the gift of God. Wherever faith exists, it is the gift of God. Faith is not a plant that grows spontaneously in the soil of corrupt human nature. It matters not whether we are talking about little faith or great faith, it is the gift of God. If we find faith in one who was raised under the sound of the gospel by godly parents, with loving care and discipline, it is the gift of God. If faith is found in one who was raised in infidelity as an educated barbarian and has lived all the former part of his life in the most vile profligacy, his faith, too, is the gift of God. Faith is the gift of grace, the operation of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, in no way dependent upon man (Ephesians 1:19-20; 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 1:12).

I take great encouragement from this fact. If faith in Christ is, in all cases, God’s gift, we should never be selective in the work of the ministry¹. Our Lord gave us no such example and no such commission. He told us plainly, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, beginning in Jerusalem and Samaria. Had our Savior carefully studied a map of Palestine, he probably could not have found a more unlikely place in the entire country from which he might expect to find men and women who would believe the gospel and become his disciples.

¹ The world’s way, the way of all denominations, to build churches is first to get some surveys, find out where the upwardly mobile, prosperous, educated part of society is moving and what they want.

Samaria was as unlikely a place as any in which we might expect to find people chosen of God to be made followers of the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus first came there, he found the great evil of racial prejudice against him. The Samaritans despised and would never trust a Jew. They would not even listen to a Jew. Yes, it is true, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Yet, the Samaritans reciprocated the feeling, and had no dealings with the Jews.

Still, it was from among the Samaritans, a race of mongrels whose faith was a mongrel faith, that the Lord Jesus gathered his elect in larger numbers than anywhere else. Judging by the events of John 4, we would always be wise to go the opposite way of the world. We ought always go first to those places and those people where there seems to be the least likelihood of conversions. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. But his thoughts are always right and his ways always best. When Paul wanted to go preach the gospel in Bithynia, God would not allow it. He had planned and purposed the salvation of some folks down in a place called Philippi (Acts 16).

If we ever truly learn that faith in Christ is the gift, work, and operation of God, a supernatural thing, it will have a profound effect. It will alter everything. We will stop trying to figure out how to make the gospel effectual, and just preach it. We will quit trying to determine where God is likely to work, and serve him where we are. We will cease trying to determine who is likely to be saved, and preach the gospel to anyone whose ear we can get. We will quit trying to make the gospel politically correct, socially palatable, and culturally relative, and just preach it.

I say to the preachers of this generation, who seem hell-bent on compromising the gospel in the name of seeing sinners converted, compromise accomplishes nothing! Any converts gained by compromise are twofold more the children of hell than they were before. Faith is God's gift, God's work, God's operation. And it is an operation performed, a work accomplished, and a gift bestowed through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17).

You and I may and must go, feeble as we are, useless as we are, and tell sinners about the sinners' Savior. We may and must scatter the precious seed of the gospel. The hand that sows the seed is meaningless. Life is in the seed, not in the hand that sows it. In spiritual matters, not even the soil matters, for it is the grace of God that makes the soil rich and fertile. Until grace comes, all is alike barren, empty and desolate. But God can make the seed sown fruitful anywhere.

He can cause it to spring up in everlasting life anywhere. He can make it spring up like a root out of a dry ground. As of old, he brought water out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, so can he bring a harvest to his glory where everything is utterly barren. If this is God's work, let us have no doubts regarding it, let us have no despondency concerning it. Let us, rather, continually put ourselves into his hands, praying that he will use us anywhere he pleases. He knows what is best and always does it. So let him do what he will.

God's Instrument

First, in verse 39, the Holy Spirit shows us the instrument God used to save his elect in Samaria. We are specifically told that God used an old harlot, a harlot saved by free-grace, to carry the gospel to the men of Samaria. — *“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.”*

How I love and rejoice in God's great, condescending goodness and grace! The objects of his grace were Samaritans. These Samaritans were not just sinners. They were the most despised sinners, a mixed breed with a mixed religion. The only thing in the world that ranked lower than dogs, publicans, and women in the minds of Jewish people in that day was a Samaritan. The fact is God's elect are always those whom we are least likely to choose (1 Samuel 16:12). Not only is it true that God's elect are the most unlikely, it is also a demonstrated fact

that God uses the most unlikely instruments for the saving of his elect and the building of his kingdom (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The message of grace was carried to Samaria by a harlot. The word she spoke was the instrument God used to bring many of his elect to life and faith in Christ. God almighty can make the weakest of instruments mighty to pull down the strong holds of Satan. That simply means that God almighty can use such things as you and me for the salvation of sinners.

The message this old harlot delivered was no more and no less than the testimony of her experience. She told her neighbors what she knew, and urged them to see for themselves whether or not she knew what she was talking about. — *“The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”* (John 4:28-29)

We see a clear display of God’s great and glorious sovereignty here, as well. Wherever you see grace exercised, you see sovereignty manifested. You do not have to look for it. You just have to open your eyes to see it. Many were converted, but not all (Acts 13:48; Matthew 22:14). Those converted were idolatrous Samaritans, not enlightened Jews. And they were converted, not by seeing miracles performed, but by the mere word of grace.

“My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Clinging to Christ

Second, in verse 40, we see this fact demonstrated — Needy sinners hang on to Christ. Those who experience God’s saving grace in Christ will be found clinging to Christ until they are with him in Glory. — *“The righteous shall hold on his way”* (Job 17:9).

“So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.” — That one sentence contains volumes of practical, spiritual instruction for our souls. The desire of the Samaritans and our Lord’s compliance with it shows the willingness of Christ to abide with and meet the needs of those who want him. The Gergesenes prayed for the Lord to depart from them (Matthew 8:34). The Samaritans prayed him to tarry with them. Both got what they wanted! What blessings those two disciples would have missed on the Emmaus road had they not said to the Lord Jesus, as he was about to leave them, — *“Abide with us”* (Luke 24:29). If we do not have Christ abiding with us, it is because we do not ask him, because we are willing to be without him (Song of Songs 3:5).

Experiences Differ

Third, I remind you, once more, that we do not all experience grace the same way. The needs are the same in us all. And the grace we experience is the same. The salvation is the same. But the experiences of God’s elect in grace and salvation vary greatly. We read in verse 41 — *“And many more believed because of his own word.”*

Some of the Samaritans were converted by the woman’s witness. Others were converted by the preaching of Christ himself. Some appear to have been converted immediately. Others were converted gradually, over the course of the two days of our Lord’s ministry in Sychar.

I call your attention to this to remind you that we must never try to put God in our little box. He just won’t fit! God saves his people as he sees fit; and he always does it in such a way that no man can say, “There, I did that. I am responsible for the grace this or that person enjoys.”

All hell must hoot with laughter while men who profess to be gospel preachers bloviate about theological trivia to immortal souls living but a breath from eternity! — While preachers and churches choose up and take sides, fussing and fighting about how a person must come to Christ, sinners are going to hell! What folly! What madness! I do not care how you come, when you came, or where you were at the time. I am concerned for only this one thing – Do you trust Christ?

Having said that, let no one mistake my meaning. I do not mean to suggest or imply in any way that it does not matter who you trust or what you believe.

Same Faith

Fourth, we see that every believer's faith is the same. All who are born of God believe the same thing. We all have the same faith. In all matters of "*the faith once delivered to the saints*," we all see "*eye to eye*." Every gospel preacher has the same message. And every saved sinner has the same faith. Is that not what verse 42 tells us?

"And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

"*Now we believe*." – Sooner or later, every saved sinner confesses his/her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It may take some, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethea, a while to openly do so, but all who trust Christ will confess him before men. Believers identify themselves with the Savior (Romans 10:9-10).

Those men of Samaria, once they were converted, said, "*Now we believe*." In those words they acknowledged that before this, they were unbelievers. Religious? Yes, but unbelievers. Bible believers? Yes. They believed the same Bible the Jews did. But they did not know God. Moral? Yes, very moral. But lost unbelievers, nonetheless. These men here repented of their former religion and abandoned it forever. They came out of Babylon!

"*Now we believe, not because of thy saying*." — The Samaritans here acknowledged that their faith was not based upon and did not arise from the words and arguments of a mere mortal. Our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

"*Now we believe, not because of thy saying for we have heard him ourselves*." Faith in Christ is the result of divine revelation. It is a matter of personal experience (1 John 1:1-3; Galatians 1:11-12).

"*Now we believe, not because of thy saying for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ*." — Those words might better be translated, "We know that this is truly the Christ," or, "We know that this is the true Christ." — Both the Jews and the Samaritans looked for and believed in a "christ," a messiah; but both looked for a political savior, a moral reformer, a false "christ." All God's people know, own, acknowledge, trust, love, and worship the true Christ.

These two things are always joined together. — When God the Holy Ghost humbles the soul for sin, he graciously makes the sinner know his need of a Savior. So that self-aborrence and Christ exalted always go together. What did Job say, when he saw God in Christ? — *Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee: I will lay my hand upon my mouth!* (Job 40:4; 42:5, 6). What did Isaiah say when he saw the glory of Christ? — *Woe is me, I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips; mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts* (Isaiah 6:5; John 12:41). What did David say? — "*Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified*" (Psalm 143:2). What did Paul say? — "*O wretched man that I am*" (Romans 7:24). If ever God the Holy Spirit opens to you your own vileness and Christ's fulness, you will respond the same way!

This one and only true Christ is “*the Savior of the world!*” He is the only Savior of the world and the effectual Savior of the world, the Savior of God’s elect in all the world. Do you know him? Have you met the Lord God of the Hebrews, as this woman and these Samaritans did? Have you seen your sin exceeding sinful? Have you seen Christ exceeding precious? If you have met the Lord Jesus Christ by the saving revelation of his Spirit, in the saving experience of his grace, then you know him as he is: the Christ of God, the Sent One of God, and One with God. Now, you can truly say with holy men of old, “*We believe and are sure that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:69).

Nothing short of this knowledge of yourself and of the Lord Jesus Christ can enable you, as this woman and these Samaritans did, to believe on him unto life everlasting. Oh, may God the Holy Ghost give you life in his Christ! Oh, may he give you grace, in this Christ-despising day and generation, to know the Lord Jesus and to believe on him for life and salvation, as he did this woman and these Samaritans!

If he has given us such knowledge and such faith, let us, like the Samaritan harlot, call others from heart-felt joy to come and see the Christ of God for themselves. And like the Samaritans under the same heart-felt conviction, let us confess and say to all who will hear us, — “*Now we believe, not because of the saying of another, but because we have heard him ourselves; and we know that he is indeed the Christ of God, the Savior of the world!*”

Chapter 37

Just for Certain Ones

“Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. 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. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told *him*, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. 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. This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.” (John 4:43-54)

Grace is not for everybody, but just for certain ones. If you read the Bible with your eyes open, that fact cannot be missed. It is as plain as the nose on your face. We read in Matthew 9:18 of “*a certain ruler*” by the name of Jairus to whom the Lord Jesus was merciful. He was in desperate need. His daughter was dead. No one could help him, but the Lord Jesus. As the Savior was going to Jairus’ house, he was detained by “*a certain woman*,” who had been plagued with an issue of blood for twelve years (Mark 5:25). How great her need! How desperate she was! She had spent all her living on physicians of no value, and only grew worse. The only hope she had was that the Lord Jesus would be gracious to her.

Then, there was “*a certain man*” whose son was a lunatic (Matthew 17:14-21), who came kneeling before the Savior, crying for mercy for his son. Who would not pity this poor man? How desperately he needed mercy! His boy was grievously vexed of the Devil. Then there was “*a certain woman*” (Mark 7:25), a Syrophenician, a Gentile, whose young daughter was possessed of an unclean spirit. She had no right to expect anything from the King of Israel. She was a Gentile dog. But, because her need was desperate, because the only hope she had was the grace of Christ, she took her place at his feet, under his table, as his dog. That poor, desperately needy soul would be satisfied with any crumb of mercy that he might toss on the floor in her direction.

There was “*a certain centurion’s servant*” (Luke 7:2), who was at the point of death. “*A certain man*” (Luke 8:27) dwelling among the tombs, possessed by a legion of devils, a wild man. How desperate was his need! “*A certain man*” (Luke 14:2) had the dropsy. We read of “*a certain beggar*” (Luke 16) named Lazarus. As the Lord Jesus came into Jericho there was “*a certain blind man*” (Luke 18:35) sitting by the roadside begging.

In The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) our Lord Jesus describes all those whom he came to save under the image of “*a certain man*” who, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, who stripped him, robbed him, wounded him, and left him half dead in desperate need. I repeat — Grace is not for everybody, but just for certain ones. Grace is for poor sinners in desperate need of grace, sinners who must have the mercy of God, who must have grace, who must have Christ.

“Leprous souls, unsound and filthy,
Come to Jesus as you are:
`Tis the sick man, not the healthy,

Needs the great Physician's care.

O beware of trust ill-grounded
`Tis but fancied faith at most:
To be cured and not be wounded,
Is to be found before you're lost."

— Joseph Hart

"Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee." — If you look back to the beginning of this chapter (vv. 1-3), you will see that our Savior was on his way to Galilee, when he was detained for two days in Samaria. He was detained there because the time had come for the salvation of many of God's elect among the Samaritans. The Lord Jesus spent two wonderful days in Samaria, raining mercy from heaven and gathering flowers of grace. Seven great lessons are stamped out in bold letters in these last twelve verses of John 4. May God the Holy Ghost write them upon our hearts and fix them in our memories, that we may use them continually as we journey through this world of time and trouble.

Prophets and Honor

The first lesson taught here is about prophets and honor. God's prophets do not seek or want the honor of the world; but none should be honored more by men than those men who faithfully minister to the needs of their immortal souls. Yet, our Lord Jesus testified repeatedly *"that a prophet hath no honour in his own country"* (v. 44).

Our Savior went back to Galilee, but not to Nazareth, his home, where he was despised and rejected. Rather, he went back to Cana, where he performed his first miracle, where men and women, *"having seen all the things that he did,"* received him. The people of Nazareth despised God's Word and lost it forever. In Cana of Galilee, where the Lord Jesus began to show forth his glory by making the water wine, needy souls believed him and received God's Word. Here John tells us that our Savior returned to that place where he was honored as God's Messenger, as God's Prophet. And here, again, we are taught that prophets, Gospel preachers, ought to be highly honored because they are God's servants. They should be honored because of the Gospel they preach. As God the Holy Ghost puts it, they should be highly esteemed in love for their work's sake (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17).

Though God's prophets should be highly esteemed and honored, they are more commonly held in contempt than honored, especially by those of their own country and kin (Luke 4:24; Matthew 13:57). Joseph, when he began to be a prophet, was hated by his brothers. David's brothers looked upon him with utter disdain (1 Samuel 17:28). Jeremiah was maligned by the men of Anathoth (Jeremiah 11:21). Paul was despised by his countrymen, the Jews. And our Lord's near kinsmen spoke of him with contempt (John 7:5). His family friends said, *"He is beside himself"* (Mark 3:21).

Men do not like to receive instruction from their peers, let alone reproof; and they are insulted by the instruction and reproof of one they consider less than a peer. Matthew Henry rightly observed, "Desire of novelty and of that which is farfetched and dear bought, and seems to drop out of the sky to them, makes them despise those" they know well. Proud religious men love titles of honor, but despise truth. Proud well-educated men love academic degrees, but despise dogmatism. Proud unlearned men love higher education, but despise heavenly enlightenment.

Look at what we are told about these Galileans, these country folk, these hillbillies, these redneck hicks from Galilee. In verse 45, the Spirit of God tells us that they received the Lord Jesus, welcomed him, believed him, and cheerfully embraced his doctrine. The reason given is that the Galileans had seen all the things the Savior did at Jerusalem.

They went up to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. The Galileans lived a long distance from Jerusalem. Their road to Jerusalem took them straight through Samaria; and no Jew wanted to walk through Samaria. Yet, in obedience to God's command, they went up to the feast; and there they became acquainted with the Lord Jesus. At Jerusalem, they saw the Savior's miracles, his wondrous works.

Things Made

Second, we are reminded in verse 46 that our Lord Jesus' first miracle was performed in Cana of Galilee, and that he "*made the water wine.*" There is a lesson here about things our God transforms, things he makes what they were not before, things entirely transformed. We are told here that our Savior "*made the water wine.*" He did not make the water look like wine. He "*made the water wine.*" He did not make the water taste like wine. He "*made the water wine.*" He did not make the water appear to be wine. He "*made the water wine.*" He did not treat the water as though it were wine. He "*made the water wine.*" And he did not make the water bear the consequences of being wine. He "*made the water wine.*"

The word "*made*" refers to a single act and means "caused to be" or "caused to become." It refers to a complete transformation of something. This is exactly the same word used in the first part of 2 Corinthians 5:21, where we are told that Christ was "*made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" I want you to see something here. The Lord Jesus was made (caused to be, caused to become) sin for us. When he was made sin, our sin was imputed to him, and he bore all the guilt of our sins, as our Substitute. Otherwise, the Lord God could never have punished him for our sins (Proverbs 17:15).

The word translated "*made*" in the second part of 2 Corinthians 5:21 is another word altogether. When the Holy Ghost speaks of God making us righteous as the result of Christ being "*made sin,*" the word translated "*made*" means "to generate," "cause to come into being," "to finish," and "to fulfil." Thus, like the water in Cana of Galilee, our Lord Jesus was made sin that he might be made a curse (Galatians 3:13) for us and die in our place. As the result of that, all for whom he died are generated to righteousness by grace, born again as righteous ones, made new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Faith and the Word

Third, we have before us a very important lesson about true faith and the Word of God. Saving faith involves hearing, seeing, and believing; and that faith is God's work and God's gift.

The Galileans believed because they saw all the things Christ did at Jerusalem. If ever you come to trust the Lord Jesus, it will be because God the Holy Spirit has caused you to see all the things Christ did at Jerusalem, when he laid down his life for his sheep. You will be caused to see, by divine revelation, that the Lord Jesus Christ satisfied justice by his substitutionary death, put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, brought in everlasting righteousness by his obedience as our Representative and Surety, saved his people from their sins, redeemed his elect, and glorified God

And this certain nobleman came to the Savior for mercy, because he "*heard that Jesus was come.*" — "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). This fact needs to be emphasized. Faith in Christ comes by hearing the Word of God preached. This faith in Christ is created in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by God the Holy Ghost, by the instrumentality of Gospel preaching (1 Peter 1:25). Did you notice that our Savior said to this nobleman, "*Except ye see sign and wonders, ye will not believe*" (v. 48). He could not believe because he would not believe; and he would not believe because he could not believe. Yet, when the Lord Jesus said to him, "*Go thy way; thy son liveth...The man believed the Word that Jesus had spoken*" (v. 50). The Word spoken came home to his heart with Divine, irresistible power, causing him to believe.

There is something else taught in this passage by the Spirit of God that is commonly overlooked. I do not want you to miss it. It is a sweet, blessed thing to learn. — Our Savior's word is as good as his presence. The Lord Jesus did not go down to Capernaum to see the nobleman's sick son, but only spoke the word, "*Thy son liveth.*" Omnipotent power went with that short sentence. That very hour the boy began to get better. Christ spoke, and the cure was done. Christ commanded, and the deadly disease was halted.

That fact is full of comfort. It gives enormous value to every promise of mercy, grace, and peace, which ever fell from Christ's lips. If we build our hope upon the Savior's Word, we are built upon a Rock that he has exalted above his very name (Psalm 138:2).

What Christ has said, he is able to do. What he has undertaken, he will perform. What he has promised, he will make good. The sinner who rests his soul upon the Word of the Lord Jesus is safe to all eternity. He could not be safer, if he saw his name written in the book of life with his own eyes. The Lord Jesus Christ has said, "*Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.*" I have come, and he will never cast me out. In all earthly things seeing is believing; but in Gospel matters believing is seeing!

Parents and Children

Read John 4:43-54 again, and see a *fourth* lesson. It is a lesson about parents and children, a lesson about parenting. Let all who are parents do as this nobleman did. Flee away to the Lord Jesus in earnest, importunate prayer, carrying your little ones, dead in trespasses and in sins, to the Savior for mercy.

There is something that stands out here and throughout the New Testament that ought to be encouraging to every mother and father. — Never once did a mother or father bring the needs of a child to the Savior who did not obtain for his child the mercy he sought.

O believing parent of soul-sick children, bring your sick darlings to the Lord Jesus. Cast them at his feet and beg his mercy for them!

Providence and Grace

Fifth, there is a lesson here about providence and grace. As the Word of Christ was proved to the nobleman by the witness of his servants, so God's providence often proves his Word. — O that we had eyes to see it! And as the sickness of the nobleman's son brought him to the Savior, so God's afflictive providences are often the means by which he hedges about his elect and sweetly forces them into the Savior's arms.

We recognize that judgment never produces repentance. Yet, the Scriptures do teach, and teach very clearly, that our God graciously arranges all the affairs of providence to graciously compel chosen sinners to seek his mercy. That is exactly what we read in Psalm 107:1-43.

What benefits affliction often bring on our souls! Anxiety about his son brought this nobleman to Christ, in order to obtain help in time of need. Once in the Savior's company, he learned a lesson of priceless value. In the end, "*he believed, and his whole house.*" All this, remember, was brought about as a result of the son's sickness.

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By adversity, the Lord often teaches us things that cannot be learned any other way. He will not hesitate to burn your barley fields to get you; and if he does, you will thank him for burning your fields. Thousands have ruined themselves, only to be healed by Christ. Untold multitudes have learned grace by the things they have suffered, and obedience by the rod of sorrow.

Let us beware of murmuring in times of trouble. May God settle it firmly in our hearts, that there is a needs-be for every tear and a message from God in every sorrow that falls upon us. J. C. Ryle rightly observed, “There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction. There is no commentary that opens up the Bible so much as sickness and sorrow.” The resurrection morning will prove that all our losses were, in reality, eternal gains (Hebrews 12:11; 1 Peter 1:3-7).

“Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!...The righteous shall see *it*, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso *is* wise, and will observe these *things*, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.” (Psalm 107:31, 42-43)

Riches and Sorrow

Sixth, we see in this passage that rich noblemen have the same sorrows as the poor nobodies. This rich nobleman was in great pain. His darling son was dying. His money did not help. His noble standing in society gave him no comfort. He was born into nobility and rich beyond imagination; but his son lay dying; and he couldn't do anything to help his dying son.

Wealth does not bring happiness. Someone once said, “Silks and satins often cover very heavy hearts.” Those who live high often sleep little. Gold and silver cannot prevent pain, trouble, and sorrow; and cannot make them more bearable. The higher the tree, the more it is shaken in the storm. The broader its branches, the bigger target it is for the strike of the lightning bolt. David was a happier man when he kept his father's sheep at Bethlehem, than when he dwelt as a king at Jerusalem and ruled the twelve tribes of Israel.

Wealth and distinction are not things to be sought. If God puts these things in your hands, you have a very great responsibility to use them for good; but do not seek them. Seek grace. Seek mercy. Seek Christ. Seek usefulness. But do not seek wealth. Do not seek honor (Colossians 3:1-3).

Death and Age

Seventh, we have before us a very sobering lesson about death and age. Here's the lesson — Death does not wait for old age. Sickness and death come to the young as well as to the old. Here is a son sick unto death and a helpless, healthy father watching. The boy is going to the grave. The father is about to bury the son.

The lesson is one we are slow to learn. We all shut our eyes to plain facts, and speak and act as if young people do not die. Yet, the grave-markers in every cemetery tell a different story. The first grave that ever was dug on this earth was that of a young man. The first person who ever died was not a father, but a son. Aaron lost two sons at once. David, the man after God's own heart, lived long enough to see three children buried. Job was deprived of all his children in one day.

These things were carefully recorded for our learning. They stand as blazing beacons, saying to all, “*Prepare to meet thy God! — Tomorrow thou shalt die!*”

The Angel that Troubles the Water

“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep [market] a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time [in that case], he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, 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. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry [thy] bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. 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: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in [that] place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.”

(John 5:1-16)

One of the many great names by which God our Savior identifies himself is Jehovah-rophe, “*the Lord that healeth thee.*” After God had so graciously delivered the children of Israel across the Red Sea, miraculously opening a path for them in the sea and then drowning Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt in the depths of the sea, he brought Israel into the wilderness of Shur, where for three days they wandered without water. The scorching sun beat down upon them. The desert sands scalded their feet. Their cattle were perishing. Their children’s tongues were swollen. And their lips were parched. They had roamed for three days in the barren wilderness without water. Then, at last, they came to the plentiful fountains of Marah. When they saw the waters of Marah, how their hearts must have rejoiced in hope and expectation. As they approached Marah, they could almost taste the water. They could almost feel the cool, refreshing water in their mouths. But when they got there, the waters were bitter and they could not drink them! Can you imagine the frustration and disappointment those men and women must have felt?

Immediately, they turned upon Moses, and began to murmur and complain. Actually, they turned upon the Lord God who had brought them to this place. Though the Lord had led them by the fiery and cloudy pillar, though he was with them, though he had miraculously and graciously delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and promised to do them good, they could not see him. All they could see, all they could think about were the bitter waters before them and the thirst within them. Because they saw nothing good in God’s providence, they despised his providence.

Do you know anyone like those Israelites in the wilderness? If we are honest, I am afraid we all must see ourselves in those grumbling people. When they should have remembered God’s goodness, they thought only of their troubles. When they should have looked to their merciful Deliverer, they looked only upon Marah’s bitter waters. When they should have prayed, they murmured. When they should have believed, they grumbled. — “*But God, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not...For he remembered that they were but flesh*” (Psalm 78:38-39).

Remember, it was God who brought Israel to Marah. He brought them here to teach them and to make himself known to them. And he did it to teach us and make himself known to us. — *“All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition”* (1 Corinthians 10:11). We read, in Exodus 15:25 and 26, that Moses *“cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*

Here in John’s Gospel we see another pool of water, a pool called Bethesda, which means, “house of mercy.” To this pool Jehovah-rophe, Jehovah our Healer, came to perform one of his great, memorable acts of mercy upon a poor, impotent sinner he saw lying by the pool.

When I read this story, I feel like Moses must have felt when he saw the Lord in the burning bush, and said, *“I will now turn aside and see this great sight.”* Everything in this story is highly significant. Everything written here is designed of God to teach us spiritual things relating to Christ, the gospel of God’s free grace, and our salvation in and by him.

The Healing Pool

The *first* thing that demands our attention is the healing pool that is described for us by God the Holy Spirit. We are told in verse 1 that our Lord Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem to keep one of the annual feasts of the Jews. We are not told which feast this was, because that is not important. Our blessed Savior went up to Jerusalem in compliance with the law of Moses, because he had come to obey, fulfil, and finish the law as our covenant Surety and Representative.

In Jerusalem near the sheep gate, here called *“the sheep market,”* there was a pool with five porches called Bethesda. This Pool of Bethesda was near the brook Cedron, which ran by Gethsemane (John 18:1). This sheep gate was sanctified in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:1, 32; 12:39), and is mentioned by Jeremiah as a place of significance in Jeremiah 31 (vv. 38-39). Right by this sheep gate, or sheep fold, stood the Pool of Bethesda.

The name of this pool, *“Bethesda,”* means “house of mercy,” or “house of grace.” Apparently, it was given this name because many had been healed of their infirmities by its waters, when *“an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water.”* Many suggest that John was simply relating a Jewish superstition. The Jews gradually became more and more superstitious, as they became wrapped up in carnal ordinances of outward religious ceremony and ignored the message of those ceremonies and the instruction of God’s Word. They actually believed that the blood of their sacrifices mixed with the water of Bethesda’s pool gave the waters miraculous, healing power. Others attempt to destroy the faith of Christ by trying to prove that the waters had certain minerals in them that gave them some healing efficacy. But the Spirit of God inspired John to write as he did, telling us both of this Pool of Bethesda and the angel that troubled the water, making its waters effectual for healing at specific times.

What does this Pool of Bethesda represent? Remember, the name *“Bethesda”* means *“house of mercy.”* Without question, it is symbolic of something connected with the mercy, grace, and goodness of God bestowed upon sinners in the saving operations of his grace.

Perhaps the Pool of Bethesda refers to God’s appointed means of grace, the divinely appointed means he uses to save his elect: — The worship of God and the preaching of the Gospel in His house. In the house of God the free, sovereign, rich, and abundant grace and mercy of God in, by, and through Christ is proclaimed as the only ground and foundation of a sinner’s hope. Here the mercy of God, as it is displayed in the covenant of

grace, in the mission of Christ, and redemption accomplished by him is preached. Here, in the House of Mercy, the mercy of God in redemption, regeneration, and in the forgiveness of sin is published abroad to sinners. And here, in the House of Grace, the whole of salvation, from first to last, is held forth for the relief of poor, helpless souls.

Whether the Pool of Bethesda has reference to the place of divine worship, I do not know. But in Zechariah 13:1, we see a fountain to which it most definitely does have reference, the fountain of Christ's precious blood, opened for polluted sinners, the fountain in which we are washed and cleansed from all sin. This fountain cures all diseases. It is opened in the house of mercy by the preaching of the gospel. The gospel itself is compared to a fountain of waters (Isaiah 4:1; Zechariah 14:8; Joel 3:18).

It is not insignificant that this Pool of Bethesda was by the Sheep Gate, or the Sheep Fold that the Lord God had sanctified. This much is certain: — Christ is found wherever his sheep are found. Those the Father has given him, the sheep for whom he died, he must bring in. Wherever they are found, there he sends his Word; and by his Word he gathers them in and heals them (Psalm 107:20).

The Spirit of God tells us that there were five porches, five large, covered porches adjoined to and surrounding the Pool of Bethesda. John Gill suggested that these five porches might be intended to refer to the law, the five books of the law written by Moses, telling us that there is no grace, no mercy, and no salvation in the works of the law. If we would be saved, we must get off the hard, cold slab of death in the law and into the living waters of grace in Christ (Romans 9:30-10:4; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:21; 5:1-4)

The Impotent Multitude

Second, the impotent multitude laying on those five porches, waiting for the moving of the water, vividly portray poor, lost sinners in the house of God (v. 3). Notice the words used by the Spirit of God to describe our lost and ruined condition, since the sin and fall of our father Adam.

“Impotent” — That is a pretty good way to describe fallen man. He is impotent before the law. Enfeebled by sin, man can do nothing to save himself. We are, by nature, impotent, as impotent as any dead man in the grave. He has neither the power to redeem himself, nor to regenerate himself, nor even to choose to be redeemed and regenerated.

“Blind” — Fallen man, dead in trespasses and in sins, is as blind as he is impotent. He is ignorant of, and blind to everything that is spiritual: himself, God, his Son, his righteousness, his grace, his salvation.

“Halt” — As the sinner is impotent and blind, he is also *“halt,”* lame on both his feet. This word, *“halt”* (lame), is used in reference to people hesitating about the things of God, halting between two opinions. It is sometimes used to speak of the infirmities of God's saints, and our falterings and failures in spiritual matters. It refers to the incapacity of man to walk. We cannot come to Christ for grace and life. We cannot walk by faith in him, except God himself turn us, and draw us, and bring us.

“Withered” — The word means *“dried up!”* That's us. — Dried up! What a pitiful looking crowd that must have been! There is one with an arm all twisted and dried up. There is another whose legs are withered. There is one who looks as if there is no moisture left in his muscles, or in his body at all. Destitute of grace and destitute of hope, without God, without Christ, poor, lost sinners are withered, dried up!

“Waiting” — These poor souls, impotent, blind, halt, and withered were waiting for the moving of the water. They were laying there because someone had informed them that on certain, specific days God sent an angel from heaven to move the water in that pool, and that the first person in the water, as it was stirred by the angel, would be healed. — There they lay, waiting at Wisdom's gates, watching at the posts of her doors.

The Angel that Troubled

Now, *third*, look at this angel that troubled the water. I cannot speak with certainty about this, because the Scriptures do not, but it appears that the Pool of Bethesda was a standing miracle in Jerusalem. It was specifically intended, by the grace of God, to be a standing witness to his mercy during those dark days of silence, between Malachi and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, those silent years in which the Lord removed the Spirit of prophecy, when Urim and Thummim were not, and the Shekinah was not seen in his house.

The Pool of Bethesda was a standing witness that the Lord had “*not cast away his people whom he foreknew.*” Therefore, the impotent folk, blind, halt, and withered, were brought here to wait for the angel of God to trouble the water, just as poor sinners were taught of God to wait for Christ. As our blessed Lord Jesus was the fountain to be opened in that day to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness, the pool of Bethesda shadowed forth his coming.

When the Son of God came here and performed the miracle of mercy recorded upon this page of Holy Scripture, and performed it without the use of Bethesda’s waters, he said to the man, to the multitude who waited for the angel to trouble the water, and to the Pharisees who stood by, — “I am the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. I am the Water of Life. And I am the Angel that Heals. My name is Johovah-rophe. *‘I am the Lord that healeth thee!’* In this day of mercy *‘the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound’*” (Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 30:26). And now, since he has come, of whom the Pool gave witness, since the Substance has appeared, the shadow has been taken away. Never again do we hear or read any mention of the Pool of Bethesda and its healing waters.

Yet, there is a striking parallel between the Pool of Bethesda and the ministry of the Word in the house of God. Gospel churches are the Bethesdas, houses of mercy, of this Gospel day. But, as in the story before us, we must wait for the descent of the Angel of God, Christ the almighty Angel of the Covenant, to give healing power and saving efficacy to the gospel we preach, the water of the Word.

There was a certain season when the angel went down and troubled the water in Bethesda’s pool. Some suggest that it was during the divinely appointed feasts days in Jerusalem. Others suggest that it was on the sabbath, the divinely appointed day of worship. Whatever the case may have been, there are certain seasons when the Angel of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes to our Gospel Bethesdas to trouble the water. At the appointed hour of public worship, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, Christ comes to stir the water (Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 3:16). At the appointed time of love, when the chosen, redeemed sinner must be called, the Angel of the Covenant comes to bring all the blessings of the Covenant to his chosen.

The troubling (stirring, agitation, shaking) of the water speaks of the Lord Jesus pouring out his Spirit upon us in the house of God, causing his Word to run swiftly to go forth to the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners in saving power and efficacy. The Angel who troubles the water is the One who heals the needy soul, Christ our Savior. John Gill made the following instructive observation...

“The Spirit of God, who moved upon the face of the waters in the first creation, in and by the ministry of the word, troubles the minds of men. And whilst the prophet prophesies, (He) causes a shaking among the dry bones, which is done at certain seasons; for as there are certain seasons for the preaching of the Gospel, so there is more especially a fixed, settled, and appointed one, for the conversion of God’s elect; who are called according to purpose, and at the time the Lord has appointed. And whoever now, upon the preaching of the Gospel, are enabled to step forth and come to Christ, and believe in him, are cured of all their soul maladies and diseases, be they what they will. All their iniquities are pardoned, their persons justified, and they are saved in Christ, with an everlasting salvation. And as this cure was not owing to any natural virtue in the

water, nor even to the angel's troubling it, but to a supernatural power; so the conversion of a sinner is owing, not to ministers, and to the word and ordinances as administered by them, but to the superior power of the grace of God, and which is exerted in his time, and on whom he pleases."

But there are two very great differences between the Pool of Bethesda and our Gospel Bethesdas. — Here is great mercy. (1.) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed in the house of God is not limited to one poor, impotent soul. The Gospel invitation is issued to all who will hear his voice; and he assures all who come to him, "*him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out!*" And (2.) the salvation of God does not wait for sinners to step into the Water of Grace. He who is God's salvation comes to poor, impotent sinners, blind, halt, and withered. He binds up our wounds and pours in the oil of his Spirit and the wine of his grace, and makes the impotent whole.

The Patient Healed

Christ is the great Physician, the Angel that troubles the water. *Fourth*, we have before us the poor patient he healed, the impotent man, blind, halt, and withered. He was impotent; and he had been that way for a long, long time (38 years). He was a certain man, sovereignly chosen, distinctly elected. He was under the watchful eye of the Son of God. — "*Jesus saw him.*" He had no ability of his own, and had no one to help him; but he was effectually called. — "*Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.*" That is a command; and with the command came the power to obey.

"And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, 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. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath."

The Day of Healing

Fifth, we are told that the day of this man's healing was the sabbath day. How often do we read of our Lord performing works of mercy and healing needy souls on the sabbath day (Matthew 12:1-12; Luke 13:11-12; 14:1-4; John 9:1-16). The sabbath day is the day Christ gives us rest from our sin, from our curse, and from our labor (Matthew 11:28-30). We observe no carnal, legal sabbath. Ours is a sabbath of faith. Trusting Christ, we have rest. Trusting him, we keep the sabbath (Hebrews 4:4-11).

Sin No More

It would be irresponsible of me to conclude the study of this portion of Holy Scripture without answering the question that immediately pops into our minds when we read verses 10-16.

"The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. 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: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day."

What did our Savior mean when he said to this man he had healed, “*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” He assured him that he was one time, with finality made whole. Then he said, “*sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” Did the Master mean to imply that if he sinned again he might be made unwhole again? — No. Did the Lord Jesus mean by this that saved sinners might lose their salvation, if they do not live right? — Of course not! Did the Savior here imply that it is possible for us to live in this world without sinning? — You know better!

What do these words mean? — “*Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” Read the command like this: — “Cease from sin, lest a worse thing come upon you” and turn to 1 Peter 4, where we see exactly what our Lord meant.

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you.*”

If the Lord Jesus has made you whole, he has redeemed you by the sacrifice of himself. He bore your sins in his own body on the tree as your Substitute. When he did, he died to sin, and you died in him. Now, you must reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God by Christ, in Christ and with Christ (Romans 6:11). Cease from sin. Trusting Christ live in freedom: free from guilt, free from fear, free from the world. And live unto him that died for you and rose again (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Live unto God, to the will of God and the glory of God, ever looking to Christ, living in the sweet and blessed “*joy of faith.*”

“*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” — God’s grace and God’s salvation are not bestowed by our merit and cannot be destroyed by our demerit. Yet, we can bring much sorrow upon ourselves by reverting to a sense of guilt, living in the apprehension of death. Though you cannot forfeit God’s grace by something you do, you may bring upon yourself something much worse than any impotence of the body. Though you cannot, when justified freely by his grace, lose God’s favor, you may bring yourself under great sorrow of heart by willful sin, causing the Lord God to hide his face from you. When the arrows of the Almighty are in you and the terrors of God set themselves in array against you (Job 6:4), that is far worse than any calamity of the body (Psalm 32:3-4; 51:4-12; 88:9, 12, 14-18).

Has the Savior made you whole? If he has, Cease from sin and live unto God by him. — “*I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Romans 12:1-2).

“Because He is the Son of Man”

“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. 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. 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. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. 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 [men] should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. 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. 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. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:17-27).

After the sin and fall of our father Adam, before the fallen pair were driven from the garden, the Lord God promised a man whom he would send to be the Savior of fallen men, a man who would come to crush the serpent’s head, a man who would make restitution to God for men and restore that which he took not away (Genesis 3:15).

Abraham understood that this man would be God incarnate, God in our flesh, God in our nature. He told his son Isaac that God himself would be the sacrifice by whom sin would be put away, the sacrifice by whom fallen man would be brought back to God (Genesis 22:8).

Throughout the Old Testament era, believing sinners looked for the coming of one man, who was known as “*the Son of Man*” (Psalm 80:17; Daniel 7:13-14). That man is the God-Man, the Man-God, whom we worship, Jesus Christ the Lord.

We have before us one of the deepest, most solemn and profound passages to be found in the entire volume of Sacred Scripture. Here the Lord Jesus asserts his own divinity in words so plain that even the unbelieving Jews understood him clearly. He declares his own eternal power and Godhead with such distinct clarity that his words cannot be misunderstood, except by those who willfully reject the Word of God as the Word of God. In these verses the Son of Man, the man Christ Jesus, states both his own divine nature and his complete, eternal union with God.

Yet, it is in this portion of Scripture that our Lord Jesus speaks most plainly of himself as that Man who is “*the Son of Man*,” Jehovah’s righteous Servant. In fact, the very words used here by our Savior to declare his Godhead are the words by which he reveals himself as “*the Son of Man*.” Truly, there is much in the verses before us that our puny brains simply cannot comprehend. Of the things here spoken by our Savior and recorded by divine inspiration for our learning, we must confess, — “*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it*” (Psalms 139:6).

Here our Lord Jesus Christ holds before us seven glaring declarations of his eternal Godhead. Yet, the things he here asserts are all said to be true of him in his office capacity as our God-man Mediator, “*because he is the Son of Man*.” Here the words of the psalmist are fulfilled: — “*His glory is great in thy salvation: honour*

and majesty hast thou laid upon him” (Psalms 21:5). Nowhere is the dignity of his character, the greatness of his being, and the glory he possesses more fully displayed than in these seven things.

His Redemptive Works

First, our blessed Savior declares that he is one with the Father in his wondrous, redemptive works. — “*But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*” (v. 17). This work of redemption, the complete salvation of God’s elect, was begun and finished by the Triune Jehovah, our great God, before the world began (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6). — It is written, “*The works were finished from the foundation of the world*” (Hebrews 4:3).

Though fully accomplished in the decree and purpose of God from eternity, our Lord Jesus engaged himself as our Surety to perform all the great works of redemption for us and in us in time, bringing to the light in the sweet experience of grace that which was done in eternity in the purpose of grace (2 Timothy 1:9-10). In all his wondrous, redemptive works the triune God is one. The works of the Father are the works of the Son; and the works of the Son are the works of the Father (John 9:4; 14:10). The Jews standing before him understood exactly what the Lord Jesus was saying.

“*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*” (v. 18). — These Jews were horrified that the Lord Jesus had healed a man on the sabbath. So, being the typical legalists they were, they tried to kill him on the sabbath day for healing on the sabbath day. Would to God I could get the ear of every child of God in this world whom religious legalists seek to bind in legal shackles, whose souls they would murder with law works if they could. I would tell them that all healing is in the Sabbath. Christ is our Sabbath. We rest in him! Pastor John Chapman wrote...

“Natural men will do anything and everything except rest in Christ and the believer has to labor to do it because of remaining sin. *‘There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief’*” (Hebrews 4:9-11).

“*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.*” I repeat; these men understood exactly what the Lord Jesus said. They sought to kill him for declaring that he is God (John 10:30-33; 19:7).

In his work our Lord Jesus is one with the Father. Yet, his great, redemptive work is a work performed in obedience to his Father (John 10:15-18), “*because he is the Son of Man,*” our Surety, Mediator, and Substitute, Jehovah’s Righteous Servant.

His Will and Purpose

Second, God the Father and God the Son are one in will and purpose (v. 19). Remember, our Savior is specifically talking to religious legalists and self-righteous zealots who were trying to murder him. — “*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.*” This does not imply a restriction or limitation placed upon his power by his incarnation. Rather, our Savior is simply declaring that he never does anything independently of his Father. Everything he does he does in pursuance of his covenant engagements as our Surety.

We must never imagine that the incarnation of God the Son placed limitations upon him. Assuming our nature enabled him to do what he never could have done otherwise. Only by becoming one of us, only by the Word being made flesh, only by the Son of God becoming the Son of Man could he...

- Bring in righteousness for us by his obedience to the law.
- Be made sin for us, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.
- Suffer death as our Substitute.
- Satisfy divine justice.
- Put away sin.
- Put all things under the feet of man.
- Be a merciful and faithful High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

He who is our Savior is one with the Father in everything he does. The will of the Father is the will of the Son; and the will of the Son is the will of the Father. The work of the Son is the work of the Father; and the work of the Father is the work of the Son. — *“Because he is the Son of Man!”*

In all that our Savior here declares, he is identifying himself as the one and only Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. He is showing us his character, authority, and power as the Man-God, the God-Man, our Mediator. These things show him to be God, but more than God: God in human flesh, God and man fully united in one person. He is fully God and fully man, *“because he is the Son of Man!”*

His Perfect Knowledge

Third, the same thing is true with regard to our Savior’s knowledge. In knowledge he is one with the Father. — *“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”* (v. 20). If the Son knows all things that the Father does, he is one with the Father. As there is no lack of omnipotence in him, there is no lack of omniscience in him. No mere creature is capable of knowing and understanding all the ways and works of God (Romans 11:33-36). Yet, the knowledge spoken of here is a knowledge conveyed to him as the Son of Man, the Man-God, our Mediator. All that the Son beheld the Father do in his eternal decree, he knows and he performs in time, *“because he is the Son of Man”* (Proverbs 8:22-31).

Then, the Lord Jesus asserted that the Father would reveal greater things than the healing of impotent folk, things that would cause even the unbelieving to marvel (John 6:61-62; 2 Timothy 1:10).

It is by his perfect knowledge as Jehovah’s righteous Servant, *“because he is the Son of Man,”* that the Lord Jesus justifies his elect (Isaiah 53:12). By the knowledge of his Father’s will and his fulfilment of it for the salvation of his elect (Hebrews 10:5-9), the Lord Jesus justifies all who trust him.

His Glorious Sovereignty

Fourth, the Father and the Son are one in glorious sovereignty. — *“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will”* (v. 21). Here, our Lord Jesus, the Man-God our Mediator, lays claim to divine sovereignty. When he healed a lame man, he did not heal all the impotent folk, but singled out one identified only as *“a certain man,”* and made him whole. The Son, like the Father, gives life to whom he will. Nothing more need be said. That ends the matter. God’s absolute sovereignty is not a fine point of theology to be debated in the coffee shop, but a glorious revelation of grace to be proclaimed from the house-top, believed in the heart, and rejoiced over in the soul (Exodus 33:18-19; Romans 9:13-16).

His Rightful Honor

Fifth, the Lord Jesus Christ is one with the Father in worship, praise, and honor, “*because he is the Son of Man*”.

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (vv. 22-23).

The Father is the one we might most naturally expect to be the Judge. He has been sinned against, wronged, and his claims denied; but the Father has committed all judgment of Satan, of men, and of this world to the Son, “*because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31). The reason for this is “*that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father,*” “*because he is the Son of Man*” (Colossians 1:14-18).

His Saving Power

Sixth, the Son is one with the Father in his saving power, snatching poor sinners from the jaws of death and bringing them into the joys of life. That is a work none can perform, but God alone.

“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. 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. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (vv. 24-26).

All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ were once dead in trespasses and in sins. They have been called by the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And being called by his irresistible, effectual, omnipotent, life-giving voice, we now live. Faith in Christ is the evidence of life, the result of having passed from death unto life. The life Christ gives is everlasting life. If we have everlasting life, we shall not come into condemnation. “*Because he is the Son of Man,*” he has life in himself; and the life he has in himself is the gift of life for his elect.

His Execution of Judgment

Seventh, the Son is one with the Father in judicial power and authority, in the execution of judgment at the last day. — “*And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man*” (v. 27). God the Father, the triune Jehovah, gave his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the power and authority to execute all judgment, “*because he is the Son of Man,*” because he took our nature into union with himself to save his people from their sins.

He who is to be the final judge of the quick and dead, is now, and will be then, our Brother, our Head, our Surety, our Advocate, and our Husband. Oh, how precious the thought! — All judgment is committed to him who was judged in our stead upon Calvary’s cursed tree!

It was because the Son of God took our flesh and walked this earth as man that he was despised, rejected, and crucified. Because he became one of us, his divine glory was denied and disowned! Therefore, the despised one shall have the place of supreme honor and authority. All will be compelled to bow the knee to him and confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 28:18; John 17:1-2; Isaiah 45:20-25). All this honor and glory, all this authority and power has been and is heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ, “*because he is the Son of Man,*” because he is our Mediator. It is his to have life in himself, and his to communicate life to whom he will. It is his to save or to destroy. It is his to deliver us from going

down into the pit, or to cast us into the pit. It is all his, for his people! How this ought to endear him to our souls!

“According to Their Works”

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son...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 5:22-29)

What do we deserve from God? If God deals with us fairly in justice, as he most surely will, what shall be our everlasting portion? The Book of God declares plainly and repeatedly that all shall be judged in the last day “*according to their works.*” So, what shall your everlasting portion be? What shall my portion be after the judgment? Everlasting life, or everlasting damnation?

Of this you can be sure: – Every one of us will receive from the holy Lord God exactly what we deserve. Because the righteous Lord loves righteousness, he always deals with all moral creatures upon the basis of strict righteousness, both in the execution of his wrath and in the exercise of his grace (Psalm 11:7). The Judge of all the earth must and shall do right (Genesis 18:25).

If God sends you to hell, he will do so upon the grounds of absolute, unquestionable righteousness. If he is pleased to bring you into the everlasting bliss and glory of heaven, he will do so upon the grounds of absolute, unquestionable righteousness. The holy Lord God will never violate, or even bend his holy law. He will not compromise his justice (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Revelation 20:11-15). And when he gets done with us, every creature in heaven, earth, and hell will declare, “*Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments*” (Revelation 16:7).

In Romans 14:10 and again in 2 Corinthians 5:10 this judgment seat before which we shall all soon stand is called “*the judgment seat of Christ.*” In Revelation 20 God the Holy Spirit describes that awesome, glorious throne of judgment before which we all must appear in the last day as, “*a great white throne,*” to set forth the power, holiness, and sovereignty of the One who sits upon it. It is called “*great*” because it is the throne of the omnipotent God. It is called “*white*” because it is pure, spotless, righteous, and just. Nothing proceeds from this throne but justice and truth. It is called a “*throne*” because the Judge who sits upon it, before whom we all must stand, is the holy, sovereign Lord God. In the last day, when all that are in the grave have been resurrected, when time shall be no more, we all must appear before this august, great, white throne to be judged of God, to be judged according to the strict and exact righteousness and justice of the thrice holy God, and judged “*according to their works.*”

Yet, while the Word of God constantly warns the wicked of the terror of divine judgment and the everlasting wrath of God, the Day of Judgment is never described as a terror to the believer, or even a thing to be dreaded by us. Rather, for the believer, the Day of Judgment is always set forth as a matter of anticipated joy and glory.

On this earth, God’s saints are constantly misjudged. His servants are maligned and slandered by reprobate men. But in that last great day, God almighty will vindicate his people, and he will vindicate his servants (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). I am not dreading that day. I’m looking forward to it! And I do so with peace. If, as a believer, a sinner saved by God’s free and sovereign grace, through the sin-atonement blood and imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand what the Bible teaches about that great day, you will look forward to it, too. Let’s see what the Bible teaches about the great white throne judgment.

A Gospel Revelation

First, here is a gospel revelation. — The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. Do not concern yourself about the signs of the times and those things that men imagine are indications of the last days. There is very little, if anything, of spiritual value to be gained by studying all the books ever written on prophetic issues. They all have to be rewritten as soon as the predicted events have failed to come to pass. We are never commanded to look for signs of our Lord's coming. We are commanded to be looking for him to come. Get this one blessed fact fixed in your mind: — Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, the Son of God, is coming again!

The Son of God is personally coming again to this earth.

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

That very same God-man who was born at Bethlehem, who lived as our Representative, and died as our sin-atoning Substitute on the cross is coming to this earth again. He said, “*I will come again!*” (John 14:3). The Apostle Paul wrote, “*The Lord himself shall descend from heaven!*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). He said, “*The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven!*” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). And so it shall be. He came once in weakness. He is coming again in power. He came once in humiliation. He is coming again in glory. He came once to be despised. He is coming again to be admired. He came once to suffer and die. He is coming again to conquer.

“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27)

The second coming of Christ will be sudden, unannounced, unexpected, and climatic. — “*The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). — Our Lord said, “*I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee*” (Revelation 3:3). The Lord does not tell us to look for the tribulation, or the regathering of Israel, or the rebuilding of a Jewish temple. He tells us to look for him. If you look for signs, and times, and seasons, you will be shocked when Christ comes. The only thing mentioned in the Word of God that will announce the Lord's coming will be “*a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

No man knows the day or hour of our Lord's coming; and that is best (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). If we knew the day or hour, we would become irresponsible and negligent with regard to our daily duties. Do not seek to know when Christ is coming. Be content with his promise, and wait for his appearing.

Our Lord Jesus may appear at any moment. — “*Behold, he cometh!*” (Revelation 1:7) Look for him upon the tiptoe of faith and expectation. All will be taken by surprise, except those who are expecting him to appear. Like those Thessalonians who believed God, we must constantly “*wait for his Son from heaven*” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Faith is ever “*looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13). Christ is coming now. John said, “*Behold, he cometh!*” That means he is on his way right now. Ever since he went up to heaven yesterday (A thousand years with him is but a day!) he has been on his way back to fetch his Bride up to heaven. Every event of providence is but the footstep of our Savior coming for us! Soon he shall appear. When the Son of God appears, he will bring with him a crown of righteousness, immortality, and life for all who love him and look for his appearing. — “*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8). — “*Blessed is the man that*

endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (James 1:12).

A General Resurrection

Second, when Christ comes, there will be a great, general resurrection of all who have ever lived upon the earth. — *“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”* (Revelation 20:13).

“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 5:28-29).

I do not offer any argument or proof for these things. I am simply declaring to you the plain facts, as they are revealed in Holy Scripture. Those who rebel against them, mock them, despise them, or ignore them do so to their own eternal ruin. But I assure you that the Son of God is coming again; and when he comes there will be a resurrection of the dead.

First, all who have died in faith shall be raised from the grave. All will be raised. But the saints of God will have distinct priority in the resurrection. *“The dead in Christ shall rise first.”* The bodies of God’s saints shall be raised from their graves and reunited with their souls: all the Old Testament saints, all the martyrs, all our brothers and sisters who *“sleep in Jesus”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Then, immediately after the sleeping saints arise, all believers living upon the earth shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-58). As our Lord descends in the brilliant glory of his second advent, we shall go out to meet him and return with him, as he comes with all his saints to burn up the earth, destroy the wicked, and make all things new. What a day that will be!

Then, after the Son of God has gathered all the ransomed bodies of his elect from the earth, after he has destroyed all the wicked with the brightness of his coming, all the wicked shall be raised. Yes, there is a resurrection for the wicked, too. But, for those who believe not, there is no music in the resurrection. The Lord himself shall issue a summons they will not be able to resist.

You will stand in terror before him whose grace you have despised, against whom you have sinned. Your body and soul now united in sin shall be united in horror. I have no word of comfort for you who will not bow to the claims of Christ. If you die without Christ, you die without hope and without peace. Your resurrection shall be a resurrection of damnation!

A Great Reckoning

Thirdly, immediately after the resurrection, we must all be judged by God according to the record of our works (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12-13). The Judge before whom we must stand is the God-man, whom we have crucified. — *“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”* — *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31). — *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

We will be judged out of the books, according to the record of God’s strict justice. When the books are opened, what shocks of terror will seize the hearts and souls of those who have no righteousness and no atonement before the holy Lord God! With the opening of the books, every crime, every offense, every sin you

have ever committed in mind, in heart, and in deed shall be exposed! This is what Daniel saw in his prophetic vision. — “*Judgment was set; and the books were opened*” (7:10).

I realize that this is figurative language. God does not need books to remember man’s sins. However, as John Gill wrote, “This judgment out of the books, and according to works, is designed to show with what accuracy and exactness, with what justice and equity, it will be executed, in allusion to statute-books in courts of judicature”.

In the Scriptures God is often represented as writing and keeping books. And according to these books, we all shall be judged. What are the books?

- The Book of Divine Omniscience (Malachi 3:5)
- The Book of Divine Remembrance (Malachi 3:16)
- The Book of Creation (Romans 1:18-20)
- The Book of God’s Providence (Romans 2:4-5)
- The Book of God’s Holy Law (Romans 2:12) — This book of the law has two tables. The first table contains all the sins of men against God (Exodus. 20:3-11). The second table contains all the sins of men against one another (Exodus 20:12-17).
- The Book of the Gospel (Romans 2:16)
- The Book of Conscience (Romans 2:15)

But, blessed be God, there are some against whom no crimes, no sins, no offenses can be found, not even by the omniscient eye of God himself! — “*In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve*” (Jeremiah 50:20).

Their names are found in another book, a book which God himself wrote and sealed before the worlds were made. It is “*the Lamb’s Book of Life*” (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). In this book there is a record of divine election. In this book there is the name of a divine Surety. In this book there is a record of Perfect Righteousness (Jeremiah. 23:6; cf. 33:16). In this book there is a record of complete satisfaction — blood atonement. And in this book there is the promise of eternal life.

The question is often raised, “Will God judge his elect for their sins and failures committed after they were saved, and expose them in the Day of Judgment?” The only reason that question is ever raised is because many try to retain the threat and fear of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, by which they hope to hold over God’s saints the whip and terror of the law.

There is absolutely no sense in which you who trust the Lord Jesus Christ shall ever be made to pay for your sins. Our sins were imputed to Christ and shall never be imputed to us again (Romans 4:8). Christ paid our debt to God’s law and justice; and God will never require us to pay. God who has blotted out our transgressions will never write them again. He who covered our sins will never uncover them. The perfect righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us. On the Day of Judgment, God’s elect are never represented as having done any evil, but only good (Matthew 25:31-40). The Day of Judgment will be a day of glory and bliss for Christ and his people, not a day of mourning and sorrow. It will be a marriage supper. Christ will glory in his Church. God will display the glory of his grace in us. We will glory in our great and glorious, triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

A Just Reward

Fourth, those who are found perfectly righteous, righteous according to the records of God himself, shall enter into eternal life and inherit everlasting glory with Christ. They that have done good, nothing but good, perfect

good, without any spot of sin, wrinkle of iniquity, or trace of transgression, shall enter into everlasting life. It is written — “*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still*” (Revelation 22:11).

Who are these perfectly righteous ones? None are so by nature and none by works of their own. But all God’s elect, every redeemed sinner, all who are born of God, all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are made righteous by God’s free, justifying, sanctifying grace. The righteousness of God in Christ is ours, imputed to us in justification and imparted to us in sanctification; and sin can never be imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:27; Romans 4:8; 8:1, 32-34).

Though there shall be degrees of punishment for the wicked in hell, because there are degrees of wickedness, there shall be no degrees of reward and glory among the saints in heaven, because there are no degrees of redemption and righteousness. Heaven was earned and purchased for all God’s elect by Christ. We were predestined to and obtained our inheritance from eternity (Ephesians 1:11). Christ has taken possession of heaven’s glory as our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Our Savior gave all the glory he earned as our Mediator to all his elect (John 17:5, 20). In Christ every believer is worthy of heaven’s glory (Colossians 1:12). Glorification is but the consummation of salvation; and salvation is by grace alone.

That means that no part of heaven’s bliss and glory is the reward of our works, but all the reward of God’s free grace in Christ! All spiritual blessings are ours from eternity in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). And that with which God blessed us in Christ before the world began he will not take from us when this world is no more (Romans 11:29). God will do all that’s necessary to bring us to Heaven, and when we get there he will say to us, “Well done good and faithful servant!”

A Just Retribution

Fifth, I must warn you, if you are yet without Christ, if you will not trust Christ, you must be forever damned. All who are found guilty of sin in that great and terrible Day of Judgment shall be cast into the lake of fire and there be made to suffer the unmitigated wrath of almighty God forever!

One by one the Lord God will call the wicked before his throne and judge them. As he says to you, “*Depart ye cursed!*” He will say to his holy angels, “Take him! Bind him! Cast him into outer darkness!” There will be no mercy for you. There will be no pity for you. There will be no sorrow for you. There will be no hope for you. There will be no end for you!

To hell you deserve to go. To hell you must go. To hell you will go. Unless you flee to Christ and take refuge in him, in that great day the wrath of God shall seize you and destroy you forever! I beseech you now, by the mercies of God, be reconciled to God by trusting his darling Son. — “*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*” Come to Christ now. Eternity is before you! Behold his infinite love (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Behold his finished atonement (2 Corinthians 5:21). Behold his amazing, almighty, saving grace (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

In that great and terrible day I hope to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, but having his righteousness. How will it be for you in that day?

“The First Resurrection”

“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)

God the Holy Spirit declares in Revelation 20:6, — “*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.*” This work of God the Holy Spirit is described in the latter part of Ephesians 1 and in the first ten verses of Ephesians 2. The first resurrection is the new birth. Salvation is nothing less than the resurrection of our souls, a resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life in Christ. It is a resurrection to life accomplished in us by the omnipotent mercy, effectual grace, and irresistible power of God our Savior. This first resurrection, the new birth, is what our Lord Jesus speaks of in John 5:25. — “*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.*”

The Condition of the Sinner

First, our Savior here speaks about the condition of every sinner. Every child of Adam is born “*dead*,” spiritually dead, “*dead in trespasses and in sins.*”

“And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” (Ephesians 2:1-5)

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” (Colossians 2:12-13)

Fallen man is not sick, wounded, or unconscious. He is dead. He is spiritually dead, incapable of motion, feeling, work, or even response. He is dead. He does not need revival. He needs life. He does not need reforming. He needs life. He does not need help. He needs life. He does not need religion. He needs life.

What is this spiritual death? Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. You know what it is for the body to be dead physically. That body lying on that hard, cold slab in the morgue waiting to be embalmed is dead. The soul has departed and has left the body insensible and incapable of preserving itself. The soul was like salt to the body. As soon as the soul is gone, the body begins to decay and return to the dust. Very soon it putrefies and becomes utterly obnoxious. Who wants to look upon a dead body, after it has been in the grave for even a short time?

Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. In Genesis 2:17 the Lord God told Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would “*surely die.*” But, when Adam ate of the fruit, he did not die physically. His physical death did not occur until hundreds of years later. The Lord must have had something else in mind, when he said, “*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*” He did indeed. He was referring to spiritual death, for “*in Adam all die*” (Romans 5:12).

This spiritual death, this separation from God is exactly what we see in Genesis 3:8. When Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord, they *“hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God.”* The fellowship had been broken. They were spiritually dead. God and man were separated by sin. A wall of death stood between the fallen pair and God their Maker.

When hanging on the cross as our Substitute, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, the Lord Jesus was forsaken of God, separated from God in death, when he was made sin for us. Though he is himself our God, when he was made sin, he suffered the consequence of our guilt that he made his own, and cried in agony no man can comprehend, *“My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Mark 15:33-34)

Man without Christ is spiritually dead. Paul describes it as *“being alienated from the life of God”* in Ephesians 4:18. Fallen man, like Adam in the garden hiding from God, is isolated from God. He hides from God, hides from his presence, and hides from his voice (Genesis 3:8-10).

The dead have none of the senses of the living. The dead cannot hear, or see, or feel, or taste, or smell. Those who are dead cannot hear the gospel, see the kingdom of God, feel the Savior’s love, taste the sweet morsels of his grace, or smell the sweet fragrance of his sacrifice. The dead cannot enter the kingdom of God. Fallen man is dead. Pity him. He is dead. — Dead to all things spiritual — Dead to all things Divine — Dead to all things eternal — Dead to holiness — Dead to truth — Dead to all his soul’s needs!

In the new birth, in the first resurrection, this spiritual death is reversed. The dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear his voice live, live by the power of that voice!

We were spiritually dead, incapable of saving ourselves, incapable of even perceiving, let alone receiving eternal life, incapable of even knowing our need of life, until the Lord Jesus came and gave us life by his almighty grace (Titus 3:5-7; Ezekiel 16:6-8; 37:1-14).

The book of Revelation speaks of the *“second death”* (Revelation 2:11; 21:8) the final, everlasting, conscious separation of lost sinners from God. Only those who have never experienced new life in Christ will partake of the second death. It is written, *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years”* (Revelation 20:6).

The Command of the Savior

But, blessed be God, there is hope for the dead. Hear our Savior’s words. — *“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.”*

There is hope, not in the dead, but for the dead. Hope is found in the command (not invitation, not offer — command) of the Savior. Our Lord Jesus declares, *“The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God.”* He initiates the call, not the preacher, or the parent, or the personal worker. The God who said, *“Let there be light,”* also says, *“Let there be life,”* and there is life. When he speaks, it is done.

What power there is in the voice of the Son of God! In the picture of our risen and glorified Lord, drawn by the pen of inspiration in the first chapter of the Revelation, after speaking of his incomparable figure, glowing and shining above the brightness of the sun, John says, *“Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword.”* In Hebrews 4, we read...

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of

the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

Christ’s voice, the voice of him who is the Word of God, is an omnipotent, life-giving voice. It was his voice that said to the paralyzed man, “*Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way!*” When the centurion of Capernaum sought him out and said to him, “My servant is sick. Just speak the word and he’ll be healed.” The Lord said, “No, I’ll go with you and lay my hands upon the servant.” The centurion said, “That’s not necessary, — not at all. You just speak — you just say the word and my servant will be healed” — And the all-powerful, omnipotent voice of Christ healed the centurion’s servant. “*Ephphatha,*” he said in Decapolis, and the deaf and the dumb could hear and speak. “*Talitha cumi,*” he said to the daughter of Jairus, and the young maiden awakened from the dead. He stopped the funeral procession in Nain, as the poor widow was going out to bury her son, and, speaking to the young man on the bier, he brought the dead to life. He simply spoke the words, “*Lazarus, Come forth,*” and, Lazarus, bound in his grave clothes, stepped out of the sepulcher full of life. The omnipotent, all-powerful voice of the Son of God will be heard and the very dead shall come to life.

“*The hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God.*” — Our Lord Jesus Christ is in Scripture, especially in the Gospel of John, called “*the Word.*” Here his voice is spoken of, but what is a voice apart from the person that utters it? What is the Word he speaks by which dead men are brought to life? Is not Jesus Christ himself the Word of God to man? The distinct, articulate manifestation of Deity is Jesus Christ. — “*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).

Behold the Christ of God and hear his voice in the incarnation (John 1:14), in his life of obedience (Jeremiah 23:6), in his sin-atonement sacrifice (Romans 8:1), in his triumphant resurrection (Colossians 2:15), in his glorious ascension (Psalm 68:19-20), and in his heavenly intercession (Romans 8:32-39).

“*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear.*” — I have told you what they will hear; they will hear the Word; but who will speak it? Who is it that alone can speak it with life-giving power? — “*When the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, they that hear shall live.*” Whenever any dead soul is made to live, it is through the Word, but it is not through the voice of the preacher. Preachers are instruments, nothing more. The voice that makes dead souls live is the voice of Christ Jesus. And the voice of the Son of God, by which the Word of God comes in life-giving, omnipotent, irresistible power, is God the Holy Spirit. — “*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63).

The gospel preached must be brought home to the hearts and consciences of chosen, redeemed sinners, effectually applied by God the Holy Ghost. It is through the Holy Spirit that the voice of Christ is heard in the soul (Hebrews 9:12-14).

What, then, can we do with sinners, if we cannot make them hear? We can pull our Master’s sleeves, and say to him, “Blessed Lord Jesus, speak the word, speak the word!” When I come into the pulpit the prayer that rises to my heart is always this, “Lord Jesus, speak your Word to the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners through this worthless, empty, dirty, broken pipe!” It is by this means that lost, ruined, helpless, dead sinners are made to live (1 Peter 1:18-25).

“Oh! let the dead now hear thy voice,
Bid, Lord, thy banished ones rejoice;
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, the Lord, our righteousness.”

The Certainty of Success

Third, our Lord Jesus here assures us of the certainty of his success in causing the dead to hear his voice. — “*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.*”

“*They that hear shall live!*” What a good word that word “*shall*” is! It is a declaration of absolute certainty. When the Lord speaks to the dead sinner, the dead comes to life by the force of irresistible omnipotence. He does not woo or entice the dead. He draws him to himself by sovereign power; and the dead are made to live. The fruit of this life that the Son of God gives is conviction (John 16:8-11). The fruit of this life that the Son of God gives is faith (John 3:36). The fruit of this life that the Son of God gives is repentance (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10). This is the first resurrection. — “*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*”

Five Reasons for Trusting Christ

“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. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. 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. 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. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. 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. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that [cometh] from God only? 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. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:30-47)

God the Holy Spirit declares, “*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*” (1 John 5:1). My prayer and heart’s desire to God for you who read these words is that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, that you might trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith says, “*We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:69). We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah, promised by God in all the Old Testament prophets. Peter’s confession, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16), is the foundation of Christianity, the foundation upon which the church of God is built, and the foundation of the gospel. This is the foundation upon which we are built and the foundation upon which we build.

If I call upon you and urge you to trust Christ, to trust your immortal soul to him, to trust his blood, his righteousness, his grace, his intercession, to trust Christ alone for your everlasting salvation, if I persuade you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is only reasonable that you should say to me, “Pastor, you are going to have to give me some reasons why I should trust him. You are going to have to convince me that I can and should trust Christ.” I hope you have that attitude. And I pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable you to receive what he has written in his Word and give you faith in the Lord Jesus. Here in John 5:30-47) the Lord Jesus himself is speaking. He is speaking to the Jews and their religious leaders, the Pharisees. As he does, he sets before us five reasons for trusting him. The Jews refused still to believe him. The Pharisees refused still to believe him. Will you believe on the Son of God?

The Savior had just performed a miracle at the pool of Bethesda, healing the impotent man, by which he showed himself to be the Messiah, the Christ of God (vv. 1-9). He declared himself God, one with the Father, a man equal with God (vv. 17-18). Rather than believing him, these Jews sought to kill him, accusing him of blasphemy; but the Lord Jesus pressed his claims upon them more fully, declaring that everything he had done was the work of God and that the Father had given him all authority and power as the Messiah, the Son of Man, the incarnate God (vv. 19-29).

He declared plainly that he and he alone had it in his power, as the Christ of God, to give eternal life to whom he will, and that in the last day he would both raise the dead and execute judgment upon the righteous and the wicked as the Christ.

Having made such assertions, our Master now gives five witnesses to himself. By these five witnesses, he shows irrefutably that he is the Christ promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. As Paul reasoned with the people of Thessalonica out of the Scriptures, “*Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ*” (Acts 17:2-3), in this study of John 5 I want to reason with you out of the Scriptures, and give you five reasons for trusting Christ. I will give you these five reasons in the witnesses to which the Lord Jesus himself pointed in this passage.

In verse 30 the Savior openly declares that he is God the Son, one with, and equal with God the Father, in all things working the works of God. — “*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.*” The Son cannot act independently of the Father, or the Father of the Son. He who is the Christ, the Son of God, is in all things (in will, in work, in word, and in his Person) in complete union with the Father.

Then, in the next verse he asserts — “*If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*” But in John 8:14 we read just the opposite of this. There the Lord Jesus says, “*Though I bear record of myself, my record is true.*” But there is no contradiction. Here (John 5:31), he is speaking in reference to the law of God which required two or three witnesses for anything to be established. According to the law, no man can be a witness in his own cause. The words of men do need confirmation, but not so the Son of God. However, Christ came to “*fulfill all righteousness*” and to do all that he did “*according to the Scriptures*” (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:15). The law required two or three witnesses for anything to be established. So our Lord Jesus, to establish his claims as the Christ of God, the Messiah, gives five undeniable witnesses to his Deity and his mission as the Messiah.

John the Baptist

The first witness our Savior calls to himself is John the Baptist (vv. 32-35). John the Baptist was that one of whom Malachi spoke, calling him Elijah, the forerunner and herald of the Christ (Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 11:14-15). The Lord Jesus reminded these Jews that John the Baptist bore faithful witness to both his person and his work, when they sent messengers to ask him who he was (John 1:20-29).

“There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.” (vv. 32-35)

“*But I receive not testimony from man*” (v. 34). — He was not appealing to the witness of John for a confirmation of his own words and works, but he appealed to John’s testimony to them. John was sent of God to arouse men’s attention and to produce in them a sense of their deep need for the One who was to come. John was indeed a famous light, burning with the knowledge of and love for the truth. For a while they pretended great affection for him; but when they saw that John’s one purpose was to bear witness of Christ the Lamb, they turned away from him; for they looked for a more splendid and glorious Messiah than the one Christ appeared to be. They despised John, the messenger, because they hated and despised Christ, the Message.

I call upon you to trust Christ, because he is that One to whom John the Baptist gave witness. John went before his face to prepare his ways (Matthew 11:14-15; Luke 1:76-79).

His Own Works

In verse 36 the Lord Jesus calls for his own works to bear witness of him. — *“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.”*

Isn't it a wonderful thing to realize that the Lord Jesus looked upon the works his Father gave him to perform for us as his Father's gift to him (John 17:4)? He calls the redemption of our souls the *“joy set before him”* (Hebrews 12:2).

Our Savior's mighty works, which he performed while walking through this earth, bore unmistakable witness to who he is and what he came to do. He frequently appealed to his works as affording Divine testimony to himself (John 10:25, 38; John 14:11; John 15:24). He caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lepers to be cleansed, and the dead to be raised to life (Luke 7:19-22)

J. C. Ryle calls attention to five things about our Lord's miracles: (1.) Their number. They were very many. (2.) Their greatness. They were mighty, supernatural works. (3.) Their public nature. They were not done secretly, but publicly for all to behold. (4.) Their nature. They were always works of love, mercy, and compassion. They were not just exhibitions of power, but were works beneficial to men. (5.) Their direct appeal to man's senses. They were real, visible, and would bear any examination.

Obviously, our Lord Jesus spoke these words for the benefit of future generations, for he speaks of the works the Father gave him to finish as works that bore witness to him as the Sent One of God (Matthew 1:21). May God give you grace to behold the works he has finished, and trust him. He finished the law. He finished the prophecies. He finished the sacrifices. He finished righteousness. He finished sin. He finished death (Hebrews 10:1-22).

I call upon you to trust the Lord Jesus Christ because he has finished the work the Father gave him to accomplish as the covenant Surety and Savior of his people. He has saved his people from their sins by the sacrifice of himself.

God the Father

Third, our Savior declares that his Father is his witness. — *“And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me”* (v. 37). At his baptism, upon the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the totality of the Book of Inspiration, the Father bears witness of the Lord Jesus, as his Son, as our Mediator, and as the Christ (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 1 John 5:7-10).

Though the Father bears witness of him, the Lord Jesus said to these Jews, and to all who refuse to trust him, *“Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not”* (vv. 37-38). You have not heard his voice. You have not seen him who is the image of the invisible God, the Revelation of God. You do not have his Word in you. You may have it memorized; but it is not in you.

None are so blind as those who will not see. None are so deaf as those who will not hear. Will you hear the voice of God who spoke from heaven? I call on you to trust the Son of God, because God the Father has born witness of him with his own voice. Every voice heard from heaven throughout the Old Testament dispensation, from the Garden of Eden to the Incarnation, was the voice of God identifying him.

The Scriptures

The *fourth* witness to our Savior is the volume of Old Testament Scripture. All the Old Testament speaks of Christ. — “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me*” (v. 39). Look at this verse line by line.

“*Search the Scriptures.*” — This refers to the Old Testament. The New Testament was not yet written. Yet, what is here said of the Old Testament may (and should) be applied to the New. All the Old Testament Scriptures were given by Divine inspiration. They were frequently referred to and appealed to by our Savior and his Apostles as the only standard and basis for all true doctrine and the solitary authority for all things in the worship of God. Therefore, we are here commanded to “*search the Scriptures,*” to diligently examine the Book of God, if we would know the mind and will of God. Test all doctrine by the Scriptures. Test every ordinance of religion by the Scriptures.

Like the churches and the religious world around us, the Jews had the Scriptures, the sacred oracles of God, in their possession. They read them and expounded them every sabbath day in their synagogues. They brought their children up, teaching them the Scriptures. But they had no knowledge of the message of Holy Scripture.

Look at the next line. — “*For in them ye think ye have eternal life.*” The Jews of our Lord’s day, like religionists today, presumed that by learning the letter of the Scriptures and practicing the ordinances of Divine worship they obtained and would inherit eternal life. They adored the Scriptures, but despised the Savior of whom the Scriptures spoke. They revered the written Word, but despised the living Word revealed by it. They made idols of ordinances, and refused to worship him portrayed in the ordinances.

Sadly, in our day, multitudes, who profess to be worshippers of God, read every dime-store novel and piece of fiction they can find, while the Book of God lays gathering dust from Sunday to Sunday beside the coat they wear to church. In the 1600s the French reformer, Pierre Du Moulin, wrote of his countrymen, “While they burned us for reading the Scriptures, we burned with zeal to be reading from them. Now with our liberty is bred also negligence and disesteem of God’s word.” Is that not the case with us?

“*And they are they which testify of me!*” — “The babe of Bethlehem,” John Trapp said, “is bound up in these swathing bands.” All the Book of God speaks of Christ; but our Lord Jesus here specifically declares that the Old Testament Scriptures testify of him. In the Old Testament Scriptures we read that this man, Christ Jesus...

- Is Jehovah, the Son of God, God, and the Mighty God.
- Is the Prophet, Priest and King of his people.
- Would be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, and born of the tribe of Judah.
- Would perform miracles of mercy upon the bodies of men.
- Would be betrayed by a friend and sold for thirty pieces of silver.
- Would be scourged, beaten, spit upon, and mocked.
- Would be despised and rejected of men and nailed upon the cursed tree between two thieves as our Substitute (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53), and that men would cast lots for his vesture.
- Would be buried, rise from the dead the third day, and ascend up into heaven.
- Would make intercession for transgressors as our Advocate and High Priest, will come again, make all things new, and sit in judgment over all nations.

I call upon you to trust the Lord Jesus, because he is the One to whom all the Scriptures bear witness.

Moses and the Law

Then, in verses 45-47 our Lord Jesus points to Moses and the law as a fifth witness to him.

“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. 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. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only? 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. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”

The Jews claimed to believe Moses and claimed to love the law of God given by his hand. But everything Moses wrote, every prophecy, every precept, every promise, every pattern, every picture of the law pointed to Christ (John 1:45; Hebrews 8:1; 10:1-4).

I call upon you to come to Christ, to trust the Son of God, because it is most reasonable for you to do so. These five witnesses should convince any reasonable person to trust Christ.

- John the Baptist
- The Works He Performed
- The Father’s Voice
- The Scriptures
- Moses and the Law

But it was not a lack of evidence that kept these Jews from believing on the Lord Jesus; and it is not a lack of evidence that keeps sinners from trusting him today. That which keeps sinners from Christ is the depravity of their hearts and the perversity of their wills. That which keeps the sinner from faith in Christ is his obstinate, depraved heart, that heart that is unwilling to acknowledge his need of Christ and incapable of trusting him, because of the enmity that is in him against God.

So I finish this study with the prayer that God, the God of all grace, will be pleased to do for you what you cannot and will not do for yourself. May he pour out his Spirit upon you, give you life in Christ, and cause you to trust him!

Amen.

Why don't people come to Christ?

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” (John 5:39-40)

Faith in Christ is set before us in many different ways in Scripture. Faith is looking to Christ. — “*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). — “*Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us*” (Psalms 123:2). Faith is trusting Christ, as a son trusts his father. — “*O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee*” (Psalms 84:12). Faith is seeking Christ, as a man seeks something he has lost. Faith is laying hold of Christ, as a drowning man lays hold of a life-line. And saving faith is described in Scripture as coming to Christ. The Lord Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him. Believers are described by Peter as a people coming to the Savior. — “*To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious*” (1 Peter 2:4).

How often poor, needy sinners came to Christ, or were brought to him in desperate need, while he walked on the earth. And as often as a needy soul came to our omnipotent, ever-gracious, all-merciful Savior, he obtained the healing power and saving mercy he needed (Matthew 8:1-3; 9:1-8, 20-22, 18-26, 27-31). Salvation is obtained by coming to Christ. The Lord Jesus is able to save all who come to God by him. The Lord Jesus has promised that he will save all who come to him. (Matthew 11:28; John 6:37; John 7:37-38). And in the Gospel narratives every poor sinner who came to Christ obtained the salvation he sought.

In John 5:39-40 our Lord Jesus is talking to religious people, people who went to church every week, people who read and studied the Bible. He says, “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*” These were Bible thumping, conservative, religious, church going people, people who read, memorized, and studied the Word of God. Yet, our Savior said to these religious people, — “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*”

Throughout the Word of God, there is a clear-cut message of redemption, through the blood of Calvary's cross. There is absolutely no salvation from sin, except through the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. Like these Pharisees, many who state their belief in a supreme being, in a Divinely inspired Bible, and even in an eternal heaven and burning hell, yet perish in their sins without hope and without God. For the Word of God clearly says, “*without shedding of blood, (there) is no remission*” of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

Christ is “*the Way,*” all without him are lost, wandering in the wilderness of sin. Christ is “*the Truth,*” men and women without him live a lie. Christ is “*the Life,*” all without him are dead in trespasses and in sins. Christ is “*the Light,*” all without him are in utter darkness. Christ is “*the Vine,*” those who are without him are withered branches to be cast into the fire. Christ is “*the Rock,*” if you are without him, you will be carried away by the flood of judgment. Christ is “*the Bread*” and “*Water of Life,*” if you are without him, you must hunger and thirst throughout eternity.

When these truths are so plainly written in the Word of God, and when they are faithfully preached day after day from the pulpit, the radio, television, the printed page, and the internet, I cannot help asking, — “Why don't people come to Christ?” If Christ is able to save, if salvation is to be had by coming to Christ, if the Lord Jesus promises to save all who come to him, and if all who ever came to the Lord Jesus Christ obtained salvation by him, in him, and with him, why don't you come to him? Why do people continue to live in unrest, unhappiness, and sin, when to come to Christ means rest, joy, and salvation from sin? To find the answer to this question, we must go to the Scriptures.

The Son of God declares, “*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*” Let me show you from the Book of God why it is that people will not come to Christ. If you do not come to my Savior, if you do not trust the Lord Jesus as your only, able, and all-sufficient Savior, it is because of these five facts revealed in the Word of God.

Spiritually Blind

First, the Word of God shows us plainly that all the sons and daughters of our father Adam are spiritually blind. Yes, man’s problem is that he is blind, so blind that unless and until he is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. He cannot see, discern, or understand anything spiritual.

Men do not come to Christ because they are spiritually blind and the gospel is hid from them. Paul says, “*If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them*” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). A blind man has no appreciation for the beautiful scenery of the Great Smokey Mountains. A deaf man has no appreciation for the glorious music of the symphony orchestra. And the spiritually blind sinner, the person who has no spiritual eyes to see, receive, and rejoice in spiritual things cannot see the kingdom of God. The things of God are foolishness to him. All mankind are in a lost and perishing condition through sin. Every child born into this world is conceived in sin, born in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; each one goes forth from the womb speaking lies.

Blessed be his name, God will save a multitude no man can number! Some have been chosen and redeemed, and shall be saved out of every tribe, tongue, and nation. God the Father chose them in eternity. God the Son redeemed them at Calvary. God the Spirit will call them irresistibly and effectually. God will save all his elect, but the rest will be lost forever, never seeing the truth, never knowing God, without Christ, because their eyes are blind and they are given over to a reprobate mind to continue in those things that are not convenient (Romans 1:28). Every vessel of mercy shall be prepared unto Glory and every vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, according to God’s eternal, unalterable, sovereign purpose (Romans 9:11-28). This is both a matter of divine justice and a matter of divine sovereignty (John 5:40; 10:25-26).

The Church of Christ must not cease from its labor until it has preached the Gospel to every creature. We must give ourselves to missions, evangelism, and witnessing, thereby fulfilling the great commission of our Savior. But we will not add one name to the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And all our labors, our most fervent and faithful labors are less than vanity, without the blessing of God the Holy Spirit. Let us ever pray that he will bless our labors, ours and those of our brethren around the world, to the salvation and consolation of God’s elect. He alone can take the things of Christ and show them to men. He alone can give sinners eyes to behold and hearts to believe the Gospel (John 16:8-11).

All the tricks, gimmicks, pleadings, and begging of churches and preachers to get lost men and women to make decisions and professions are useless, worse than useless; it is a mockery of God and a mockery of men’s souls!

Unless God the Holy Spirit performs a Divine operation on their blinded minds, and opens their eyes to receive God’s truth, blind sinners shall remain blind. None but God the Holy Spirit can “lead men to Christ.” Only God the Father can “draw men to the Son.” Sinners will not and cannot come to Christ of their own accord, because they are blind and cannot see their condition and their need of Christ. Natural men do not see that they are wicked and that “*God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:11). They do not know the plague of their hearts. They cannot understand that salvation is in the blood of Christ. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to them. All of these glorious truths are revealed and known only by the work and power and operation of God the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel.

We must preach, yes, but we must wait upon the Spirit to convict and convert. The emphasis today is not upon the faithful preaching of all the Word of God, but it is placed upon getting sinners to “make a decision,” teaching them to say “the sinner’s prayer,” and pressing men to “accept Christ;” — all terms that never appear in the Word of God. Nowhere in the Bible do we find God’s preachers going around begging the wicked to “decide for Christ” and “accept Jesus.” — Not once! In the Bible you find God’s prophets delivering “*the burden of the Word of the Lord,*” condemning sin, calling sinners to repentance, holding their feet to the fire until, smarting under the pricks of the Spirit, they cried, “*What must we do to be saved?*”

The knowledge of these truths does not lead to fatalism, nor to an anti-evangelistic spirit, but will lead us to properly emphasize “all” Bible doctrine and will correct those unbiblical methods so often used to enlist great numbers of unsaved Church members, who have made a decision for Christ, but who have never been born of the Spirit, to make proselytes of others. In the mad race for numbers and praise from men, churches around the world put on shows and employ all the tricks of snake-oil salesmen to get more people on the church roll and make them feel secure until they wake up in hell, forever lost!

When these modern deceivers of men’s souls have compassed land and sea to make one disciple or a million disciples, they have done nothing for the benefit of any, but only make them twofold more the children of hell. As a result of all the religious carnival acts in them, the churches of this reprobate age are filled with sinners who are trying to live the Christian life without Christ, who are trying to act holy without having holiness, and who are “*the blind*” trying to “*lead the blind.*”

It is time for preachers and churches to start being honest. — It is a sin against God and sinners to trick and talk men into professions without faith, and decisions without regeneration. The Lord Jesus said...

“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” (John 5:40)

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 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. 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. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. 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? 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 6:37-44)

Spiritually Dead

Why don’t people come to Christ? You will not come because you are spiritually blind; and, *second*, you will not come because you are spiritually dead. Men do not come to Christ because they are dead in trespasses and sins and must be quickened by God’s Spirit. In the heart of man there dwells no good thing. In the soul of man there is no spiritual life. In the mind of man there is no longing for or seeking after God.

Men out of Christ are dead. They are just as dead and helpless spiritually as a corpse is helpless physically. I would as soon expect a dead man to get out of his casket, go into the kitchen and get himself a drink of water as expect a sinner to rise out of his sins and come to Christ who is the Water of Life, without the quickening, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

If a man is ever saved from sin, he must first be effectually quickened by the Spirit of God. Paul in writing to the Ephesians calls our attention to the fact that we were “*quickened*” to life (Ephesians 2:1) by the Spirit. God does not perform this effectual work of the Spirit in the hearts of all men, but only in the hearts of those he has purposed to save. He saves men on purpose. There are no accidents with God.

This talk of “God has done his part, now you must do your part” completely destroys salvation by pure, free, grace, making it to depend on the works of man, which is no more grace but works. Man made his decision in Eden. He chose to disobey God and serve Satan. That decision still controls the hearts of unregenerate men. Now God is calling his people out of every nation under heaven, the people redeemed by the precious blood of his dear Son. God does not tell us that the destiny of any man rests upon our success as soul-winners; but he has sent us out, telling us to preach the Gospel to every creature. The work of regeneration is in his hands, the hands of the Spirit’s omnipotent grace!

I suppose every preacher in the country has a sermon on the words of Pilate, — “*What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*” (Matthew 27:22). They use it to try and prove to the sinner that the salvation of his soul rests entirely in his deciding for Jesus. But very few preachers are fair enough to preach on the reply the Lord Jesus made to these words of Pilate. He said to Pilate, “*thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above*” (John 19:10).

There you have it, sinner, we are in the hands of a God who does as he pleases and he is responsible to and answerable to no man for his actions. He said to Moses, “*I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy*” (Exodus 33:19).

Spiritual Enmity

Why don’t people come to Christ? They are spiritually blind. They are spiritually dead. And, *third*, their hearts are filled with enmity against God. Sinners, whose hearts are enmity against God, are filled with spiritual enmity toward the Gospel, and are violently opposed to God’s terms of salvation. People despise the fact that God declares them to be doomed, damned, dead sinners, without any ability before him. That is the doctrine of Total Depravity. Men hate the fact that salvation is by the will and choice of God alone. That is the doctrine of Unconditional Election. Oh, how men hate the fact that salvation comes to sinners by the merit of Christ’s effectual redemption. That is the sweet doctrine of Limited Atonement. Sinners everywhere despise being told that salvation comes only by the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit. That is the doctrine of Irresistible Grace. And sinners hate being told that salvation’s security is completely assured to all who trust Christ because, and only because we are preserved and kept by grace. That is the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.

Sinners refuse to come to Christ because of his terms of salvation. The average man would be willing to accept a salvation from the fires of hell if he could have it and keep the reins of his life in his own hands; but that will never happen. The Son of God demands that we surrender to him as our Lord. Faith in Christ is nothing less than the surrender of myself to him (Luke 14:25-33).

There are two kinds of faith. There is a faith that centers in me, and what I can get from God. And there is a faith that centers in God and his glory. If my faith is primarily concerned with me, and what I want, then the object of my faith is me. I really worship myself. If my faith is primarily concerned with God and his glory, then God is the Object of my faith. I worship him.

Martin Luther once defined salvation as “the realization of God’s will and purpose, whatever it might be, rather than the satisfaction of human need.” He saw that true faith is not seeking something from God, but bowing to the rule of God. Calvin said, “True faith is having confidence in God, regardless of profit or loss.” It is the heart’s willing affirmation of God’s right to be God. This is the one issue between God and man.

Sinners will not come to Christ because they hate his terms and will not submit to them. They will not lay down their weapons of warfare and their arms of rebellion, until the Spirit of God has laid bare their hearts, stripped them of their self-righteous rags, and destroyed all their false foundations.

Another Refuge

Isaiah 28:14-20 gives us a *fourth* reason why sinners will not come to Christ. If you are yet without Christ, if you still harden your heart and will not hear his voice, you choose not to trust the Son of God because you have another refuge.

“Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.” (Isaiah 28:14-15)

What is your refuge? Where are you hiding? What is your covenant with death? — Your good works? — Your decision for Jesus? — Your religious experience? There is only one refuge for our souls; and that Refuge is the one God himself has provided for sinners, Jesus Christ the Lord, his blood, his righteousness, his grace! — “*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste*” (Isaiah 28:16). God give us some preachers today who will rout sinners out of their refuge of lies and exalt the God of the Bible!

“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only *to* understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*.” (Isaiah 28:17-20)

Without Grace

Here’s the *fifth* reason why sinners will not come to Christ. Sinners who will not come to Christ will not come because they are without grace. Our savior says in John 5:40, “*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*” In chapter 6, verse 44 our Savior is still talking to these self-righteous Pharisees, these religious hypocrites. He tells us plainly that the reason men and women will not come to Christ is that they cannot come. — “*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.*”

Those who will not come are to be blamed for their obstinate, willful unbelief. It is the perversity, the depravity, the bondage of man’s will to his nature that keeps him from Christ. Men will not come because they hate God. They will not come because they love sin. They will not come because they do not want to come.

Still, when all is said and done, the reason why sinners do not come to Christ is this. — They who refuse to trust the Son of God are yet without grace. If you now come to Christ, your coming is proof that you have been given grace to come. If you do not come, it is because God almighty has left you alone, and you are without grace (1 Peter 2:3-10). If you believe on the Son of God, it is because God has saved you by his grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Calculating without Christ

“After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is [the sea] of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. 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? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 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? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered [them] together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” (John 6:1-14)

Of all miracles performed by our Lord Jesus, the feeding of the five thousand is the only one recorded by each of the four Evangelists (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). Of all the great works our Savior performed, none was done so publicly and before so many witnesses as the feeding of the five thousand. There must be something about that great miracle that is unique and of special importance.

“*After these things*” (v. 1). — “*These things*” refers to those things mentioned in chapter 5: the healing of the impotent man, the persecution by the Jews because the Lord Jesus had performed that miracle of mercy on their sabbath day, and his lengthy discourse on his deity, power, and mission as the Son of Man, the Messiah, the God-man Mediator. After all those things, because they believed him not, our Savior left Jerusalem and went over the Sea of Galilee. He left them to themselves, left them to be damned, believing a lie and clinging to their religious traditions. What a warning this ought to be to every religious ritualist!

Though he left Jerusalem, a great multitude followed him, “*because they saw his miracles*” (v. 2). Like countless others in every age, these poor souls loved excitement and found gratification in wonders; but they totally failed to perceive the Savior’s doctrine. They did not trust him as the Son of God, the Savior of sinners, and the promised Messiah (John 2:23-25; John 6:25-26). We see the same thing today. People everywhere follow clever evangelists, fake healers, miracle workers, and religious showmen, but few are interested in Christ the Redeemer, the Savior of poor, needy sinners.

In verses 3 and 4 our Lord withdrew himself, even from the crowd that followed him across the Sea of Galilee. Weary with their unbelief, weary with their self-righteousness and empty traditions, he took his disciples up into a quiet, secluded place. The Passover was at hand; and John notes that the Lord’s Passover had degenerated into “*a feast of the Jews.*” Though the Passover was near, “*the Lamb of God*” who was in their midst was unknown and unwanted.

Tender Care

First, I call your attention to our Savior's tender care for the needs of men. After a while, the Lord Jesus came down from the mountain; and the great multitude that had followed him was still there. Matthew tells us, "*He had compassion on them and healed their sick*" (Matthew 14:14-15). The Master then put Phillip to a strong test. He knew what he was going to do (v. 6); but to test Phillip's faith, he asked him, "*Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*"

Phillip was a man much like you and me. He looked at the crowd, saw the need, and began to calculate. He said, "We don't have enough money to buy a little snack for this many people, let alone to feed them. Two hundred pennyworth of bread would only give each one a "*little*" to eat."

What a sad portrait Phillip is of us in this trial! How often in our daily trials and difficult situations we start to calculate the need, and draw back. How often when seeing a work to be done for Christ and the souls of men we start calculating the need, and draw back. Phillip began to calculate his own resources and abilities to accomplish the task of feeding this huge crowd, and said, "Lord, we can't do it." — Imagine talking of "*little*" in the presence of infinite power and riches! What is our feebleness compared to his power? What is our emptiness compared to his fullness? Instead of looking to him, Phillip, like us, looked to himself and his own strength.

Unbelief is a horribly infectious thing. In verses 8-9 Andrew, who had been a disciple longer than any of the others, said the same thing; and all the others agreed (Mark 6:37). Andrew, Phillip and all the rest of the disciples seem to have forgotten what they had seen, and heard, and learned. They all seem to have been temporarily blinded to the glory and power of Christ. — "There is a boy here with five pieces of bread and two little fish, but we can't feed all these people with that!" There is just one problem with their calculations: — They were calculating without Christ! (Psalms 78:19-22). — "*Is any thing too hard for the LORD?*" (Genesis 18:14).

"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.'"

No strength of our own, nor goodness we claim;
Yet, since we have known the Savior's great name,
In this our strong tower for safety we hide, —
The Lord is our power; — 'The Lord will provide!'"

If our Lord Jesus was moved with compassion upon these multitudes, many of whom he knew were not his own, and so moved that he performed an astounding miracle to provide for the needs of their bodies, shall he not, without a doubt, provide for every need of our souls and our bodies? My brother, my sister, let nothing tempt you (Let nothing tempt me!) to be cast down with fear and unbelieving! As Hawker put it, "Both your bread that perisheth with using, and that which endureth to everlasting life, shall be given, and your water sure." It is written, "*He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure*" (Isaiah 33:16). — "*My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19).

Disciples Used

Second, notice that our Lord Jesus chose to use these same disciples to feed the crowd. How patient the Lord was with his unbelieving disciples! There was not even a hint of rebuke (Psalm 103:13-14). The Lord Jesus

simply said, “*Make the men sit down*” (v. 10), and proceeded to perform another miracle using those poor, weak, unbelieving disciples, just as though they had believed him perfectly and unhesitatingly.

Mark tells us they sat down by companies in ranks by hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:39-40). I see four things here.

1. The Lord Jesus told the disciples to seat these people in an orderly manner, because our God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33).
2. Not only that, our Lord required these people to be seated, because the activities of the flesh must come to an end, if we are to be fed the Bread of Life (Psalm 23:2).
3. Our great and gracious God and Savior does not need, but he condescends to use such insignificant, weak, and worthless things as we are to perform his great works in this world (John 11:39; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 1 Peter 1:23-25).
4. He even accepts and uses the most insignificant gifts we might put into his hands. We read in verse 11 that “*Jesus took the loaves.*” He did not scorn the loaves because they were few nor the fish because they were small. God uses small and weak things.

Distributing Bread

Third, in verses 11 and 12 we see that the work of God’s servants in this world is distributing bread to hungry souls.

“And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

The Lord Jesus “*took the loaves*” and the fish. He gave “*thanks.*” — Thus, he teaches us to acknowledge God as the Giver of every good gift and to own him as the one who provides all things. He distributed to the disciples. The disciples distributed to the people. What a clear picture this is of the way God uses men to perform his wonders of grace in this world. Let us never despise the means he uses (Ephesians 4:10-13; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

The disciples did not make the loaves and fish increase and multiply; but they increased and multiplied. By a strange, heavenly kind of arithmetic, they were multiplied by division and increased by subtraction. God’s gifts grow in the hands of those who use them for the benefit of others, especially for the benefit of his people. It was the Savior’s almighty power that provided an unfailing supply of food. It was the work of his disciples to receive humbly, and distribute faithfully.

That is a very vivid picture of the work every gospel preacher is meant to do. The preacher is not a mediator between God and man. The pastor has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. The preacher’s work is to receive the Bread of Life, which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls among whom he labors. He cannot make men value the Bread, or receive it. He cannot make the Bread effectual, beneficial, and saving. He cannot cause the Bread to meet any need, or compel anyone to eat it. That is God’s work, not the preacher’s. Preachers are not responsible for those things.

The whole work of the gospel ministry is the faithful distribution of the Bread of Life. The preacher must seek the Bread by earnest prayer and diligent study. Deacons were ordained in the church so that God’s preachers might devote themselves to seeking the Bread of Life and have no concern about earthly bread (Acts 6). The preacher must faithfully distribute the Bread among hungry souls.

Divine Omnipotence

Fourth, this miracle stands before us as an undeniable display of divine omnipotence. We see our Lord Jesus feeding five thousand men with “*five barley loaves and two small fish.*” When the day was over, “*twelve baskets of fragments*” remained after all those thousands had eaten all they could hold. Nothing less than the creative omnipotence of the almighty God could have performed this great miracle. This man, the God-man, called food into existence that did not exist before. In healing the sick and raising the dead, he mended and restored that which had previously existed. Here something had to be created which had no prior existence.

This miracle ought to be especially instructive and encouraging to all who seek to do good to immortal souls. It shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, “*able to save to the uttermost.*” He has all power over dead hearts. Not only can he mend that which is broken, build that which is cast down, heal that which is sick, and strengthen that which is weak, he can do and does greater things than these. He calls into being that which was not before (2 Corinthians 5:17), and calls it out of nothing! With a Savior who, by his Spirit, can create a new heart, nothing is impossible!

All Filled

Fifth, look at verse 12. The Spirit of God tells us that, “*They were filled.*” All those thousands of people, when fed by the miraculous power and grace of the Son of God, were filled. When the Lord Jesus feeds us, he fills us with grace and satisfies our souls with fatness (Colossians 2:9-10). His grace is all-sufficient grace (Romans 5:20-21; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

Nothing Lost

Sixth, take notice of the fact that our Savior required his disciples to “*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*” When they did, they had twelve heaping baskets full of leftovers (vv. 12-13). There was abundance for all, and the boy had twelve baskets to take home. The liberal soul is made fat (Proverbs 11:25).

I am certain that our Savior’s intention here was not merely to teach us to be frugal with our earthly goods. No, his instruction is far more needful. He required this gathering up of the fragments to teach us that we must take great care not to lose by our neglect the bounties of the gospel (Hebrews 2:1-4). Let us take care that we do not lose that which God has given us. Let us never be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Let us never be turned aside from the simplicity that is in Christ. Let us never be entangled with the yoke of bondage and the works of the law.

Come, hungry soul, and eat this Bread. Eat this Bread and live forever (John 6:47-50, 53-58).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of 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....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. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” (John 6:47-50, 53-58)

Alone in the Dark

“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? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 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? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered [them] together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was [now] come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. 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. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” (John 6:5-21)

When I was a boy, boys were taught never to show fear. If a boy let another boy know he was afraid, he would never hear the end of it. But not showing fear and not having fear are two different things. I tried never to show it, but of all the things that caused me fear when I was a boy, other than the thought of my mother with a belt, nothing compared with being alone in the dark.

In these verses the Apostle John was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record two of our Lord’s great miracles. At first reading, they might appear to be unrelated; but that is not the case. In fact, if you read the Word of God carefully, you will see that it was written with a very specific order. The things that happened were brought to pass with very precise order; and our Lord’s miracles were both performed and recorded in that precise order to teach us specific aspects of his greatness and his grace. In verses 5-14 the Lord Jesus took five loaves and two small fish from the hands of a boy and fed 5000 men. In verses 15-21 we see the Lord Jesus walking across the troubled, storm tossed sea to his disciples. In the first miracle the Lord Jesus used a huge crowd of hungry people to prove Philip and the other disciples. In the second miracle the Son of God sent his disciples sailing directly into a storm, that he might prove them. Like these disciples, you and I must have our proving times.

We often have our proving times. Don’t we? Our proving times are seasons appointed by the Lord himself in which he proves himself to us and proves us to ourselves. These are times of trial and adversity, times that call for and demand faith, and more. These proving times are times in which the Lord God graciously works faith in us, forcing us into his omnipotent arms of mercy, compelling us to do what we will never otherwise do, compelling us to cast all our care on him who cares for us. — What a proving time it was for Abraham at Moriah! — What a proving time all those years were for Jacob, when he thought Joseph was dead! — What a proving time Job endured when the Lord turned Satan upon him! — What a proving time Peter had when the Lord Jesus permitted Satan to sift him as wheat!

What are we to learn from these two miracles, from these two proving times? What lessons do these two miracles hold for you and me? Why are they here recorded as they are, by the finger of God, for our learning and our admonition?

The Lord Knows

First, learn this and remember it. — The Lord God, our great Savior, always knows what he will do.

“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? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do” (vv. 5-6).

We are often caught off guard. Nothing ever catches him off guard. We are often taken by surprise. Nothing ever catches him by surprise. We are often unprepared. He is never unprepared. Our great God and Savior always knows what he will do. He knew what he would do before Lucifer fell, before Adam sinned, and before we went astray from the womb. He knows what he will do for poor, lost sinners chosen of God before all worlds, loved by him with an everlasting love, and redeemed by his precious blood. Child of God, he knows what he will do for you.

“He knows: let this my comfort be;
He knows the path designed for me;
A healing balm for all my woes—
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

The thorns that pierce my weary feet;
The lowering clouds, the storms that beat;
And then, with bliss of calm repose,
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

He knows: let this suffice for me;
He knows the end I cannot see;
Then let my anxious heart be still,
And patient, wait my Savior’s will.

My prayer for strength to Him is known,
Though breathed in secret and alone;
The weary heart, the tear that flows,
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

The things our Savior knew he would do in these two miracles are the very things he is constantly doing with us and for us. He was about to show his disciples their utter insufficiency (John 15:5). And he was about to show them his all-sufficiency (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Gideon’s army was a mighty one indeed, when it was reduced to an army of 300 men too scared to get a drink of water. And I assure that before ever the Lord Jesus causes the light of his grace to shine upon you, he will fill you with the darkness of his terror.

Nothing Lost

Second, when the Lord Jesus tries and proves us, though he sift us as wheat and refine us as silver, nothing shall be lost by the trial, and much gained. These very disciples whom the Master proved were required to “*Gather up the fragments that remained, that nothing be lost*” (v. 12); and they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments! Israel lost nothing by their four hundred years in Egypt; and they spoiled the Egyptians when they came out of

the land of bondage. Job lost nothing, but gained much by his great trials. Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego lost nothing in the fiery furnace. Peter lost nothing by Satan sifting him. And our Savior asks all who forsake all and follow him, “*Lacked ye anything?*” And all must acknowledge, “*Nothing*” (Luke 22:35).

“But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west.” (Isaiah 43:1-5)

After our Lord Jesus performed this great miracle, those who saw what he had done said, “*Surely this is the Messiah, that Prophet*” (v. 14; John 1:21; Deuteronomy 18:15). Like all of Israel, they were looking for a leader, a king, a Messiah to lead them in a successful revolt against the hated Romans (Acts 5:36-37). They did not understand that the Messiah’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36), but within us. They did not know the meaning of the sacrifices and the atonement portraying the Messiah’s redemptive work. But they were expecting the Messiah.

Do not be misled by those who talk of Christ the Prophet and King, but who despise his cross. Our Lord immediately withdrew from these ambitious men who wanted to make him king over a nation of unbelievers. He came to save sinners, to redeem a people for his glory, to call out of every nation a holy people to reign forever with him in a new heaven and a new earth (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9-10). These Jews had professed with their lips Christ as that Prophet, and would by force make him King; but there is another office, which comes in between these. Christ must officiate as Priest, offering himself as a sacrifice for sin. Besides, he needed not to be made king by them; he is the King (Revelation 19:16).

Nights Alone in the Dark

Here’s the *third* lesson. — While living in this world, we will have, and must have our nights alone.

“And when even was *now* come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them” (vv. 16-17).

Oh, blessed is the sinner whom the Son of God sweetly forces to be shut up alone in the darkness of his guilt and sin (John 8:1-8). Matthew tells (Matthew 14:22-23) us that the disciples boarded this ship and set sail for the other side, because the Lord Jesus told them to do so. They looked for the Master on every boat that passed; but he did not come to them. Then, it got dark; and he still had not come to them. There they were in the middle of the sea, because they were obeying him; but he had not come to them. They were alone in the dark. Then, a terrible storm arose (v. 18). They manned the oars and rowed hard against the storm; but these experienced seamen knew they were getting nowhere. The darkness was thick. The storm was great. The winds were strong. — And they were alone in the dark. They were the Lord’s servants; but the Lord was not with them. They were doing what the Lord told them to do; but he had not come to them. They had twelve baskets of food in the boat with them; but they couldn’t eat a bite.

Every lost sinner’s life is one long, starless night. But the believer has his night too. We have our nights of trial, adversity, and pain. We have our nights of emptiness, desolation, and woe. We have our nights of sorrow, bereavement, and heartache.

The Church of God has her night. She is “*not of the night,*” but she has “nights.” Darkness, tempest, and dangers are all around us. “*Famine, and nakedness, and peril, and sword*” continually assail us (Job 30:26; Micah 7:8; Isaiah 50:10). How dark the night is when the Lord Jesus is not with us! When he appears to have abandoned us!

“How tedious and tasteless the hours,
When Jesus no longer I see;
Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and sweet flowers,
Have lost all their sweetness with me!
The mid-summer sun shines but dim,
The fields strive in vain to look gay;
But when I am happy in Him,
December’s as pleasant as May.

His name yields the richest perfume,
And sweeter than music His voice;
His presence disperses my gloom,
And makes all within me rejoice!
I should, were He always thus nigh,
Have nothing to wish or to fear;
No mortal so happy as I,
My summer would last all the year.

Content with beholding His face,
My all to his pleasure resigned;
No changes of season or place,
Would make any change in my mind.
While blessed with a sense of His love,
A palace a toy would appear;
And prisons would palaces prove,
If Jesus would dwell with me there.

Dear Lord, if indeed I am Thine,
If Thou art my sun and my song;
Say, why do I languish and pine,
And why are my winters so long?
O drive these dark clouds from my sky,
Thy soul-cheering presence restore;
Or take me unto Thee on high,
Where winter and clouds are no more.”

— *John Newton*

Does darkness engulf you? Does danger seem to roar around you? Has desertion withered you? — Things are not as they appear. — Child of God, the Savior is with you! The night has not come because of some evil you have done; but to make you know, again, and again, by experience, your utter insufficiency and Christ’s all-sufficiency. These night seasons, alone in the dark, make us conscious of our need. The Savior’s mercy, love, and grace are unchanged!

“If ever it should come to pass
That one sheep of Christ should fall away;

My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day.”

These night seasons are not wasted seasons. In fact, in the Word of God we find that for God’s saints these night seasons are very profitable seasons for our souls. In the darkness of night the Lord God has given stars for light (Jeremiah 31:35; Revelation 1:20). In the night season, when we find ourselves in the dark alone, we are compelled to seek the Savior (Song of Solomon 3:1-5). The night of darkness is the time when the sweetest revelations of the Savior come (Daniel 7:2, 9; Zechariah 1:8). Nicodemus came to the Savior by night; and we do too. In the darkest of the night, the Lord God our Savior will appear for our glorious defense (Isaiah 4:5-6).

“And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.” (Isaiah 4:5-6)

Christ Comes in the Darkness

Fourth, the Lord Jesus will come to you in the night of your storm, and come to you in such a way as he could not otherwise appear.

“And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. 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. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid” (vv. 17-20).

The Lord’s disciples were in the midst of a terrible storm, in the middle of a dark, dark night. They were toiling hard with trouble; but everything appeared to be contrary to them. In those circumstances, our all-glorious, ever-gracious Savior came to his troubled friends walking upon the sea that caused them so much trouble. They were afraid (terrified). They thought they saw a ghost! As he approached their little, storm tossed boat, he said, “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*” Then, “*he went up unto them into the ship, and the wind ceased*” (Mark 6:45-51).

This is written in the Book of God for you and me, “*that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). The Lord Jesus will graciously step into your storm-tossed life and cause the winds that appear to be so contrary to you today to be calm.

Remember, it was the Lord Jesus who sent his friends into the storm, who sent them away from himself (Mark 6:45-46). He seems to have done so specifically that he might come to them when they desperately needed him, speak these words to them, and make himself known to them in a way that was not otherwise possible. Surely, that is the case with you. Listen, then, to the voice of your tender, omnipotent Savior in the midst of your storm. — “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*”

“*It is I*” who raised the tempest in your soul, and will control it. — “*It is I*” who sent your affliction, and will be with you in it. — “*It is I*” who kindled the furnace, and will watch the flames, and bring you through it. — “*It is I*” who formed your burden, who carved your cross, and who will strengthen you to bear it. — “*It is I*” who mixed your cup of grief, and will enable you to drink it with meek submission to your Father’s will. — “*It is I*” who took from you your strength and health, your peace and tranquility. — “*It is I*” who made the light darkness about you and raised the contrary winds. — “*It is I*” who have done all these things, not against you, but for you, not to hurt you, but to do you good. I make the clouds my chariot, and clothe myself with the

tempest as with a garment. The night hour is my time of coming to you. The dark, surging waves and billows are the pavement upon which I walk to you. Take courage! — “*It is I.*” Don’t be afraid. — “*It is I,*” your Friend, your Brother, your God, your Savior! I am causing all the circumstances of your life to work together for your good. — “*It is I*” who brought this storm that assails you. Your affliction did not spring out of the ground, but came down from above, a heaven sent blessing, as an angel of light clothed in a robe of darkness. William Cowper’s hymn describes God’s ways so well. We need often to be reminded that, as Cowper put it...

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.”

Deep, in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace.
Behind the frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower!”

He who loves you with an everlasting love has sent the storm in love for your soul, not in anger. Be assured, my brother, be assured, my sister, — your trial will not be forever. It will not always cast you down. — “*It is I*” who ordered, arranged and controls it. In every stormy wind, in every dark night, in every lonely hour, in every rising fear may God the Holy Spirit give us grace to hear our Savior’s voice saying to us, “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*”

Poor sinner, do you despair of life? Has guilt shut you up alone in darkness before God. — If the Lord has stripped you, he will clothe you. If he has emptied you, he will fill you. If he wounds, he will heal. If he kills, he will make alive. If you know your need of him, come to him for mercy, for he has come to you with mercy. If now you seek his mercy, your cry for mercy is but the answer to mercy already bestowed.

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,—
‘Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,

As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovedst me.”

Christ in the Ship

Fifth, as soon as the Savior comes, the troubled soul receives him willingly into the ship; and immediately the ship lands in its desired haven. — “*Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went*” (v. 21).

This language seems to indicate that a miracle of grace was immediately wrought. They were instantaneously saved from their danger. The desire of their hearts was fully met, and immediately! Instantly, they arrived at the longed-for haven of rest. As soon as Christ is willingly received into your ship, that reception of the Savior is always accompanied with deliverance and rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Instant salvation is the gift of him who saves to the uttermost.

When the disciples got to about the middle of the lake, they seemed to be beaten. They could do nothing. But what they could not do, the Lord Jesus immediately did when he got into their ship. — “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.*”

“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalms 107:23-31)

Blessed is that night of darkness that introduces us more fully into the fellowship of and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! And blessed be his name forever, there is a day coming, the long, eternal day of glory is at hand! — “*So shall we ever be with the Lord!*” If his presence made night not only endurable but even pleasant for these disciples, what joy his presence will make for us in that coming day!

“There is coming a day when no heartaches shall come
No more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye.
All is peace forevermore on that happy golden shore,
What a day, glorious day that will be.

There’ll be no sorrow there, no more burdens to bear,
No more sickness, no pain, no more parting over there;
And forever I will be with the One who died for me,
What a day, glorious day that will be.

What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon His face,

The One who saved me by His grace;
When He takes me by the hand
And leads me through the Promised Land,
What a day, glorious day that will be.
What a day, glorious day that will be!"

The Work God Requires

“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. 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. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:22-29)

The Jewish Talmud states that, “The whole law was given to Moses at Sinai in 613 precepts.” It was summarized and given to the children of Israel in Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Those Ten Commandments are holy, just and good. They reveal something of the character of God and show us our sin. Those Ten Commandments identify sin for us and show us our need of a Savior, a Mediator, a Substitute, a Redeemer and Representative: One who can stand between man and God, to meet the demands of God for us and satisfy our needs before God as men. That Mediator is Christ, the Son of God.

Isaiah, writing by divine inspiration, reduced all the commandments to six, promising that all who (1.) walk righteously, (2.) speak uprightly, (3.) despise the gain of oppression, (4.) refuse to be bribed, (5.) despise the shedding of blood, and (6.) turn away from evil “*shall dwell on high*” (Isaiah 33:15-16). The Prophet Micah reduced all the commandments to just three (Micah 6:8). And during the days of his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ declared that all the commandments could be reduced to just two (Matthew 22:37-40).

The six hundred and thirteen precepts of the law, when reduced to their essence, require but two things from us: that we love God and that we love one another perfectly. Yet, these two great and good commandments condemn us all. Not one of us loves God or his neighbor perfectly. Still, hope is not gone. We can yet fulfill the law of God completely and perfectly. We can do all that God requires of man, if we keep the one commandment to which God promises eternal life. Are you interested in the one work which God requires of men and women, the one work by which sinners fulfill all the law of God? Our Lord Jesus states it plainly in verse twenty-nine. — “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*”

Our Lord Jesus knows the thoughts of every man’s heart; and he knew the thoughts of these people who pretended to honor him. He knew their secret motives. Commenting on verses 22-26, J. C. Ryle wrote...

“Let us be real, true, and sincere in our religion, whatever else we are. The sinfulness of hypocrisy is very great, but its folly is greater still. It is not hard to deceive ministers, relatives, and friends. A little decent outward profession will often go a long way. But it is impossible to deceive Christ. ‘*His eyes are as a flame of fire*’ (Revelation 1:14). He sees us through and through. Happy are those who can say — ‘*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*’ (John 21:17).”

“*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed*” (v. 27). — What our Lord forbids here is not labor and care with regard to material things. The Lord God nowhere promotes sloth and idleness, and nowhere encourages indifference with regard to our earthly responsibilities. What he does forbid is excessive

care for material things. Rather than devoting ourselves to that which is marked for destruction, the Lord Jesus here instructs us to seek him, to set our hearts on him, to devote ourselves to the pursuit of everlasting life, to live not for time but for eternity. This life everlasting is that which is the gift of the Christ, our God-man Mediator, *“the Son of Man.”* This Mediator, this Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is that One that *“God the Father sealed,”* stamped with his royal signet, marked for security, and kept secret.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” (v. 28) — We love works; don’t we? Give us something to do; and we’ll do it! That is the religion of man, the religion of the world, your religion, and my religion by nature. We all want to weave a web of righteousness of our own spinning, spinning a thread from our own entrails by which we might climb up to heaven. No man wants salvation free of cost.

Martin Luther was exactly right when he called works religion *“the devil’s feces.”* Those who seek to be saved by works, he called *“the devil’s martyrs,”* because they take great pains to go to hell.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (v. 29). — Did you read that right? — *“This is the work of God, (The one and only work that God requires of you and me!), that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”* This is the work God requires, the work God performs, and the work God accepts. We read in 1 John 3:23, *“This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”* Faith in Christ is what God requires of man!

Five Things about Faith

I do not claim to know a lot about faith. I feel like the centurion who said, *“Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.”* But I am very interested in this subject, and you ought to be. The Word of God has a lot to say about faith.

Our Lord said, *“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”* (Mark 9:23). — *“If ye had faith as a grain of a mustard seed, ye might say to this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you”* (Luke 17:6). — *“If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God”* (John 11:40). — He once said to a harlot, *“Thy faith hath saved thee!”* (Luke 7:50). — *“When he saw”* the faith of four men who brought a sick friend to him, he said to the one they brought to him, *“Man, thy sins are forgiven thee”* (Luke 5:20).

Paul wrote, *“Being justified, by faith we have peace with God”* (Romans 5:1). — He also said, *“By grace are ye saved through faith”* (Ephesians 2:8). The Word of God highly exalts faith! Here are five things revealed in the Word of God about faith in Christ...

1. Faith is the foundation grace.

While love is the greatest of all graces and hope is the grace of comfort and expectation, faith is the foundation grace from which both love and hope spring (John 3:36; Mark 16:15-16; Romans 10:11-15). The first evidence of life in the soul is faith. Faith in Christ is the proof that we have life. Believing on Christ we have been delivered from penal death in justification and spiritual death in regeneration.

No form of works, no religious profession, no amount of knowledge, no feelings and emotions can assure me that I am both absolved of guilt and born of God, but faith does (1 John 5:1).

As faith is the first evidence of life in the soul, so all true, spiritual life is sustained by faith. The child of God does not trust his emotions or his devotions, his feelings or his doings. He looks to Christ. — *“The just shall live by his faith!”* Spurgeon said, *“Hearty belief in God, his Son, his promises, his grace is the soul’s life,*

neither can anything take its place. 'Believe and live' is the standing precept both for saint and sinner." John Flavel wrote, "The soul is the life of the body. Faith is the life of the soul. Christ is the life of faith."

Faith is the foundation grace. If you do not have faith in Christ, you do not have life. You are yet in your sins. The wrath of God is upon you.

2. This faith is the gift of God.

You may believe many things. And there may be many types of faith in man. But saving faith, that faith that unites a sinner to Christ in a living, indissoluble union is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is not the product of the flesh (John 1:12-13; Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12).

3. Sinners are justified by faith alone.

Faith is not the cause of justification. That is the grace of God. Faith is not the basis of justification. That is the blood of Christ. But faith is the voice of justification. Faith is the means by which we receive justification and by which God declares justification in the heart (Romans 4:25-5:1-11; Galatians 2:16).

4. True, saving faith is a growing grace.

Everything that is alive grows. If our faith is the dead faith of religious profession and doctrinal orthodoxy, it does not grow and increase. But if our faith is a living thing, it grows. — "*Your faith groweth exceedingly*" (2 Thessalonians 1:3). Believers "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). As faith grows assurance grows. As faith grows love for Christ and one another grows. As faith grows rest and peace increase. The more we grow in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the less concern we have for life, the less interest we have in the world, and the less fretful we are in trials!

5. There are many imitators of faith, many kinds of false faith that cannot save.

False faith can do much to impress men and to impress us with ourselves. — "*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble*" (James 2:19). Even a casual reading of Holy Scripture reveals that false faith...

- May be greatly enlightened and have great knowledge (Hebrews 6:4).
- Excites the affections of the stony ground hearer.
- Reforms the outward life and makes people religious Pharisees.
- Speaks well of Christ as Nicodemus did in John 3.
- Confesses sin with great sorrow like Judas.
- May humble itself in sackcloth and ashes with Ahab.
- May repent like Esau.
- May do religious works with diligence.
- May be very generous as Ananias and Sapphira were.
- May tremble at the Word of God with Felix.
- May experience much in religion (Hebrews 6:1-4).
- May enjoy great religious privileges like Lot's wife.
- May preach, perform miracles, and cast out demons (Matthew 7:23).
- May attain high office in the church with Diotrephes.
- May walk with great preachers as Demas walked with Paul.
- May be peaceful and secure like the five foolish virgins.
- May even persevere and hold out until the Day of Judgment (Matthew 7:22-23).

Three Questions

What is saving faith? — I cannot give you a plan or a blueprint and say, “Follow this, do that, say the other, and you will have faith.” Anyone who tells you how you can obtain faith knows nothing about faith. The gift of faith is God’s sovereign prerogative. God the Holy Spirit gives faith to chosen, redeemed sinners through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). And saving faith has three characteristics (2 Timothy 1:12).

1. **Knowledge** – *“I know whom I have believed.”* A man cannot believe what he does not know. You cannot trust an unknown, unrevealed Savior (John 20:30-31). No one has faith in Christ until he knows something of the Bible, something about the character of God, something about his own depravity, guilt, and sin, and something of the person and work of Christ. You cannot trust Christ until you know who he is, what he accomplished at Calvary, and where he is now. Saving faith is not a leap in the dark. Saving faith is based upon revealed truth and knowledge (Romans 10:13-14). But there is more to faith than knowledge. There must also be a...
2. **Persuasion** – *“I am persuaded.”* Paul said, I know what God has revealed, and I am persuaded that it is true. I not only read the Scriptures and understand what they say about the person and work of Christ, but I give full consent and agreement to them. It is impossible for anyone to have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who puts a question mark on the Word of God. Still, there is something more to saving faith than knowledge, or even persuasion. Many, I fear, are persuaded of gospel truth who do not have faith in Christ. This third, vital element of faith is missing in them.
3. **Commitment** – *“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”* — Paul committed himself to Christ. He trusted to Christ all the affairs of his life and trusted Christ alone for his everlasting acceptance with God.

“My life, my love I give to thee,
Thou Lamb of God Who died for me;
O may I ever faithful be,
My Savior and my God!”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Thomas Brooks wrote, “He that believeth on Christ shall be saved, be his sins never so many. He that believeth not on Christ must be damned, be his sins never so few.” *“He that believeth on the Son (of God) 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).

Why is faith in Christ necessary? — Much could and should be said in this regard. But for the sake of brevity, let me just give you three reasons for the necessity of faith, three reasons why we must trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. **The only way fallen men and women can ever please the holy Lord God is by faith in Christ** (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 3:31; 8:1-4). — No sinner has ever pleased God, except by faith in Christ; and every sinner who trusts the Lord Jesus pleases God and fulfills all the law of God.
2. **There is no true humility apart from faith.** — Grace is for the humble. God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud. But the only humble person in the world is the one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone else has something to claim as a ground of merit before God, or imagines that he does. Believers are truly humble. We need a Savior and know it. We come to Christ with empty hands, trusting him for everything. We receive Christ and the grace of God in him as a gift, not a wage or reward. We trust Christ alone for our total, everlasting acceptance with God (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for grace!”

3. **Faith in Christ is necessary, because there is no other way for a sinner to come to God and be saved** (Romans 4:16). Christ alone is the Way (John 14:6). Christ alone is the Door (John 10:9). We cannot be saved any other way (Acts 4:12).

Do you have this saving faith in Christ? — Do I? — This question is vital. It must not be passed over lightly (2 Corinthians 13:5). Find the answer to this question and you will make your calling and election sure. Do you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? I cannot answer that question for you. You must answer for yourself. But this much I know: — He who has saving faith experiences the power and grace of God in his Son. Faith is more than Doctrine! Faith involves personal experience; and the experience is a growing experience.

He who has faith in Christ has great, high esteem for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. — “*Unto you therefore which believe he is precious*” (1 Peter 2:7). His blood is precious blood. His righteousness is precious to all who have no other righteousness but his. All who have faith in Christ renounce and continue to renounce all personal righteousness, knowing that all their *righteousnesses are filthy rags!* His very name is precious to all who know him, for his name reveals who he is.

“*Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*” — This is the work God requires, the work God performs, the work God gives. — “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent!*”

Some Things that are Sealed

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” (John 6:27)

I’ve gone through the Book of God many times marking those things we are told God has sealed. Every time I look at these things, I am both instructed in the things of God and blessed in my soul. May God the Holy Spirit be pleased to open the Scriptures to our hearts by his grace and reveal these things that are sealed to us in the fresh experience of his grace.

A Sealed Savior

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” — The Lord Jesus here declares that he, as the Son of Man, that One who gives everlasting life to all who trust him, is a sealed Savior. — *“For him hath God the Father sealed.”* What does that mean?

The word that is translated *“sealed”* throughout the New Testament means “stamped for security, preserved, or kept secret.” Really, the sentence might be more correctly translated, — “Him hath the Father sealed, God.” If that is the case, John is telling here the same thing Peter announced on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-23). — God the Father has demonstrated beyond question that this Man is God.

This is one of those many, precious places in Holy Scripture in which we see, in very few words, a huge volume of sacred theology. Here, in just seven words our Lord Jesus declares that all three persons of the triune Godhead concur and co-operate in the great work of redemption and grace by Christ Jesus. I fully agree with Robert Hawker, when he said...

“No doubt, all scripture is blessed, being given by inspiration of God; but there is a peculiar blessedness in these sweet portions, which at one view, represent the Holy Three in One, unitedly engaged in the sinner’s redemption.”

Who could be the *“him”* here spoken of, if not the Lord Jesus? Who, other than God the Father, could seal him? With whom was Christ sealed and anointed, except God the Holy Spirit? Who, but God, could give such a full, instructive and blessed testimony to the glorious foundation-truth of the whole Bible in just seven words? — *“For him hath God the Father sealed.”*

Let us ever behold, as the warrant of our faith, the divine authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, our Mediator. He (and he alone) is infinitely suited for our poor souls’ needs in every state and every circumstance. The validity of all his gracious acts and deeds as our Substitute is founded in this: — *“For him hath God the Father sealed,”* — marked and stamped from eternity, by his choice, appointment, and decree, as the Lamb slain and accepted from the foundation of the world, and marked and stamped in time by his Spirit.

- By the Spirit of Prophecy (Acts 10:43).
- By the Spirit of His Anointing (His Baptism).
- By the Spirit He has Given (Galatians 3:13-14; Acts 2).
- By the Spirit of Revelation (John 16).

It was the Spirit of Jehovah that was upon him, when he was anointed to *“preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to give deliverance to the captive, and the restoring of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”*

This great Savior, whom God the Father has sealed, is thus held forth and recommended by the great seal of heaven to every poor sinner who knows his need of salvation. Every act of his love, every word of his lips, every deed of his hands, every work of his grace proclaims the Lord Jesus as “*Him whom God the Father hath sealed!*” Help poor sinners, O Lord God, by your blessed Spirit, to receive Christ the Savior as the One sealed by God, to rest in nothing short of being sealed by your Spirit.

In every act of faith, in every tendency of our souls let us live unto our blessed Savior, with those same earnest longings of the church, when she cried out, — “*Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.*”

A Sealed Book

First, we have a sealed Savior. In Revelation 5 we are told about a sealed book (Revelation 5:1-7).

“And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.”

The book John saw is the book of God’s eternal decrees. It represents God’s eternal purpose of grace in sovereign predestination, which includes all things. It is to this book that our great Surety referred when he said, — “*Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God*” (Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:5-10).

William Hendriksen said of this book, “It symbolizes God’s purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history, and concerning all creatures in all ages and unto all eternity.”

The Lord our God is a God of purpose, eternal, unalterable purpose (Isaiah 46:9-11). The object of God’s eternal purpose of grace in predestination is the salvation of his elect (Romans 8:28-30). Everything that comes to pass in time was purposed by God in eternity (Romans 11:36). And the object of God in all that he does is the effectual accomplishment of the everlasting salvation of his elect.

In election, God chose a people whom he would save. In predestination, he sovereignly ordained all things that come to pass to secure the salvation of his chosen. And in providence, he accomplishes in time what he purposed from eternity.

As John saw it, the book of God was closed, a mystery sealed with seven seals. The seven seals do not represent an imaginary “seven dispensations” of time. The writing within and on the back and the seven seals simply means that God’s purpose is full, complete, perfect, and unalterable. Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken from it. The seven seals also tell us that God’s purpose of grace is unknown, unrevealed, a secret known only to God, until Christ reveals it.

A Sealed People

In Revelation 7 we read about a sealed people. There is a vast multitude of people in this world called “*the elect*,” a people chosen in eternity and redeemed at Calvary, who must be sealed by the Spirit of grace (Revelation 7:1-4).

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*”

(2 Peter 3:9) “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

(Revelation 7:9-12) “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and *about* the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be* unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

When God saves a sinner, that sinner is sealed by the Holy Spirit, marked as God’s own, secretly preserved and kept by God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:12-14; 4:30). It is this sealing of the Spirit that was symbolized in the Old Testament rite of circumcision. The sealing of the Spirit is that circumcision of the heart that is made without hands (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11-12).

We would be wise to make Ephesians 4:30 the motto of our daily walk. Is God the Holy Spirit grieved when a child of God forgets the Lord Jesus, and by indulgence in any sin, loses sight of those sufferings which he endured because of sin? Yes, he is grieved, communion with God the Father is interrupted, and all the agonies and bloody sweat of our dear Savior are forgotten, when any ransomed soul lives a loose and careless life.

Shall I grieve the Holy Spirit, my Divine Keeper, by the allowance of wickedness? God forbid! Would you grieve for me, O Lord, at such a sight? Can it be possible that a poor worm of the earth, such as I am, should excite such regard and attention? Such considerations should be enough to keep us from evil. Yet, we will run eagerly after the poisonous ooze of our own depraved hearts, except the Lord Jesus himself keep us from the evil by his blessed Holy Spirit!

Blessed, ever-gracious Lord God, withdraw not your restraining influences; leave us not for a moment to ourselves! If you keep us, we shall be well kept! Blessed Son of God, “*Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me!*” Let me not grieve him by whom I am sealed unto the day of redemption!

God’s church in this world is a sealed fountain. — “*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed*” (Song of Solomon 4:12-15). The church of Christ is a garden flourishing with good works, works done for him, works which he has created in us. She is a garden planted by his grace and watered by his Spirit, so thoroughly and effectually watered that she has become herself a fragrant, fruitful fountain of

gardens and living waters, with streams flowing out of her into all the world to refresh the earth. That is the picture drawn in the Song of Solomon 4:12-15. — “*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.*”

Our works, the works of God’s church, those works performed for Christ are never counted by us as being worthy of anything. We know that if we did all things perfectly, we would only have done what we should have done. We constantly repent even of our best, noblest, most righteous works, because “*all our righteousnesses are filthy rags*” before the holy Lord God. But he whom we love and serve looks upon our puny works as his pleasant fruits. They are rich, sweet fragrances; the smell of which ravishes his heart. They are works of faith and love. They are works produced by him and honored by him (Ephesians 2:10). That which is done by faith in Christ, arising from a heart of love for him, is honored and accepted by him. Let us ever rest in his love and walk in communion with him. And let us faithfully serve our Redeemer who loved us and gave himself for us.

A Sealed Vision

In Isaiah 29 we learn that there are many in this world to whom the gospel of Christ and the Word of God is a sealed vision.

(Isaiah 29:9-12) “Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”

To every sinner left to himself, not being taught of God, the Book of God is a sealed vision, because “*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).

A Sealed Vengeance

In Deuteronomy 32 we see a fifth thing that is sealed. In this place the word translated sealed is, of course, a Hebrew word; and the meaning is slightly different. The word means “closed up, ended, stopped.” In this chapter the Lord God warns the ungodly, those who, because they have no understanding, do not trust Christ and do not worship God, that the vengeance and wrath that he shall execute upon them is a sealed vengeance for the time appointed. Sinners, be warned, you shall not escape the vengeance of God, except you take refuge in Christ.

(Deuteronomy 32:34-35) “*Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*”

(Ecclesiastes 8:11) “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”

A Sealed Bag

All who are taught of God come to Christ and live by him (John 6:45). And all who come to Christ find, as they come to him, that their sins are in a bag cast behind God's back into the depths of the sea of infinite forgetfulness. So, the sixth thing described in the Scriptures as a sealed thing is a sealed bag (Job 14:17).

(Job 14:14-17) "If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? My transgression *is* sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity."

In ancient times when men died at sea, their bodies were placed in a weighted bag, which was sewn together and sealed. Then, they were cast into the depths of the sea. That is what God has done with our sins. They are cast "*into the depths of the sea.*" When Christ died, by his one sacrifice for our sins, which were made to be his, he put away all our sins. They were buried in the sea of God's infinite forgiveness, put away, never to be brought up again. God almighty will never charge us with sin, impute sin to us, remember our sins against us, or treat us any the less graciously because of our sin. That is forgiveness! — "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*"

When Job asks, in verse 16, "*Dost thou not watch over my sin?*" the obvious answer is, "Yes." And if he finds any, we are forever damned; but that cannot be, because he has cast them away in a sealed bag (Jeremiah 50:20).

A Seal Desired

The seventh thing is a seal desired. — "*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame*" (Song of Solomon 8:6). This is a prayer which arises from the earnest hearts of God's believing children. Yet, it is a prayer any sinner desiring mercy, grace, and salvation might make at the throne of grace. — "*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.*" The allusion here is to the high priest in Israel. The prayer is really twofold: We long to know that we have an interest in the love of Christ's heart; and we long to experience the power of his arm (Exodus 28:12, 29-30, 36-38).

Believers know the meaning of this prayer by personal experience. It is the longing, the desire of a sinner seeking grace to know that his name is engraved upon the Savior's heart. In the language of the psalmist, we say to the Lord Jesus, "*Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*" I desire an interest in your love; but I want more. I want to know that I have an interest in your love. Write my name in your heart, and engrave it as a signet upon your heart, so that I may see it and know it.

Without question, there are many whose names are written on our Lord's heart who do not yet know it. Christ has loved them from all eternity. His heart has been set upon them from everlasting. But they have not yet seen the signet with their names written upon it. In all of his work our great High Priest bears the names that are upon his heart.

- For them he makes intercession (John 17:9, 20; 1 John 2:1-2).
- He bore their sins in his body upon the cursed tree (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).
- He endured all the unmitigated wrath and horrid fury of divine judgment to the full satisfaction of justice for them (Isaiah 53:9-11).
- He made atonement for them, putting away their sins by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26).
- He obtained eternal redemption for them by the merit of his blood (Hebrews 9:12).
- Upon them he pronounces the blessing of God (Numbers 6:24-27; Ephesians 1:3-6).

We want to know by personal experience the power of our Savior's arm. We want always to see and know that our Redeemer's heart and hand are eternally engaged for us, engaged to accomplish our everlasting salvation. This is our souls' desire. We want to know and be assured that the Lord Jesus Christ is our High Priest, our Advocate, our sin-atonement Mediator before God. If we can know that we have a place in his heart of love and that his arm is set to do us good, we want no more. All is well with our souls. His arm preserves us, protects us, and provides for us. This is the prayer we make. What more could we desire than this? — *“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.”*

Four Pleas

Anytime we go to God in prayer, it is wise to not only make our request known to him, but also to offer a plea, an argument, a reason why he should grant the thing we ask. Be sure that you understand this: The only grounds upon which we can appeal to God for mercy are to be found in God himself (See Psalm 51:1-5). Our hope, our basis of appeal with God must be found in him.

Do you see how the spouse here urges her request? She says, “Make me to know your love for me, because I know this concerning your love: — It is as strong as death. — It is as firm as the grave. — It is as intense as fire. — And it is as unquenchable as eternity. With these four pleas, we back up and press our suit for mercy.

1. **Show me your love, for your love is strong as death.** — *“Love is strong as death.”* The love of Christ is as irresistible as death; and the love of Christ triumphed over death for us. As death refuses to give up its victims, so the love of Christ refuses to give up its captives. Nothing shall ever cause the Son of God to cease loving his people and let them go.
2. **Show me your love, for your love is as firm as the grave.** — *“Jealousy is cruel as the grave.”* These words would be more accurately translated, “Jealousy is as hard as hell.” Our Lord is jealous over his people. He will not allow those he loves to be taken from him. You will more likely see the gates of hell opened, the fires of hell quenched, and the spirits of the damned set free than see the Son of God lose one of those who are engraved upon his heart (Romans 8:28-39). Those God has chosen he will never cast away. Those Christ has redeemed he will never sell. Those he has justified he will never condemn. Those he has found he will never lose. Those he has loved he will never hate.
3. **Show me your love, for your love is as intense as fire.** — *“The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.”* These words seem to allude to that fire which always burned at the altar and never went out. Those coals of fire were always kept burning in the typical Levitical dispensation. The flame was originally kindled by God. It was the work of the priests to perpetually feed it with the sacred fuel. The love of Christ is like the coals of that altar which never went out, and more. The love of Christ for his own elect is vehement, blazing, intense love that never diminishes. The only cause of his love for us is in himself. There is nothing, no form of love to compare with his love. And the love of Christ for his elect is free, sovereign, eternal, saving, immutable love.
4. **Show me your love, for your love is as unquenchable as eternity.** — *“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it”* (Romans 8:37-39). No other love is really unquenchable, but our Savior's love is. His love is eternal and everlasting, immutable and unalterable. The love of Christ is infinitely beyond that of a father or a mother, or a brother or a sister, or a husband or a wife. The love of Christ is the one and only love that passes knowledge, the one love that nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is able to extinguish or cool, the one love whose dimensions are beyond all measure (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Unquenchable Love

Our Redeemer's love is here compared to fire that cannot be quenched. As such it is affirmed that "*waters,*" "*many waters*" cannot quench it. Christ's love for us is something the floods cannot drown (Psalms 69:15; 93:3). The waters of God's wrath could not quench the love of Christ for his people. — "*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.*" It was our Savior's matchless love for us that made him willing to endure all the horror of God's wrath in our stead.

The waters of shame and suffering sought to quench and drown it. They would have hindered its outflow, and come (like Peter) between the Savior and the cross; but his love refused to be quenched on its way to Calvary. Herein was love! It leaped over all the barriers in its way. It refused to be extinguished or drowned. Its fire would not be quenched. Its life could not be drowned (Psalm 69:1-7).

The waters of death sought to quench it. The waves and billows of death went over the great Lover of our souls. The grave sought to cool and quench his love; but it proved itself stronger than death. Neither death nor the grave could alter or weaken his love for us. It came out of both death and the grave as strong as before. Love defied death, and overcame it.

Even the floods of our sins could not quench the love of Christ for us. The waters of our unworthiness could not quench nor drown the love of Christ for our souls. Love is usually attracted to that which is loveable. When something ugly, unlovely, unattractive comes, love (as it is called) withdraws from its object. Not so here. All our unfitness and unloveableness could not quench nor drown the love of Christ. It clings to the unlovely, and refuses to be torn away.

The waters of our long rejection sought to quench it. Though the gospel showed us that personal unworthiness could not arrest the love of Christ, we continued to reject him and his love. We continued to hate him and despise his love. Yet, his love for us rose above our enmity to him, rose above our unbelief, and survived our hardness. In spite of everything we are and have done, his love was unquenched.

Though he has saved us by his matchless grace, the waters of our daily inconsistency seek to quench his love, but, blessed be his name, without success! Even after experiencing his adorable grace, we are constantly spurning his unspurnable love! What inconsistencies, coldness, lukewarmness, unbelief, worldliness, hardness, and utter ungodliness daily flows from us against the Savior's love like a mighty flood to quench its fire and drown its life! Yet it survives all; it remains unquenched, unquenchable, and unchanged!

All these evils in us are like "*waters,*" "*many waters,*" like "*floods,*" torrents of sin, waves and billows of evil, — all constantly laboring to quench and drown the love of Christ! They would annihilate any other love, any love less than his. But our Savior's love is unchangeable and everlasting.

"I ask my dying Savior dear
To set me on His heart;
And if my Jesus fix me there,
Nor life, nor death shall part.

As Aaron bore upon his breast
The names of Jacob's sons,
So bear my name among the rest
Of Thy dear chosen ones.

But seal me also with Thine arm,
Or yet I am not right.
I need Thy love to ward off harm,

And need Thy shoulder's might.

This double seal makes all things sure,
And keeps me safe and well;
Thy heart and shoulder will secure
From all the host of hell."

Three Pearls Strung Together

“They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. 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. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. 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. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 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. 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 6:30-40)

One of the glories of the gospel is its simplicity. It is so simple, and presented in such simple language, and is illustrated by such simple pictures that proud men who think they are wise stumble over the obvious and go to hell, while studying that which they think is profound. That was the problem the Jews in John 6 were having with the doctrine of Christ. Those standing before our Lord Jesus were Pharisees and the disciples of the Pharisees. They asked the Lord Jesus what they had to do to do the works of God (v. 28), and he told them. — *“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”* (v. 29). Then, in verse 30 they asked him for a sign. — *“They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?”* Before he even answered them, those proud Jews started to brag about their ancestors and Moses’ feeding them in the wilderness (v. 31).

Our Master seized the opportunity to declare that he is the Bread of Life, represented in the manna God sent down from heaven, to declare the purpose for which he came into the world, and to declare the certainty of his success in accomplishing his Father’s will, which is the everlasting salvation of all his elect (vv. 32-40).

Here are three of our Lord’s great sayings, strung together like pearls on a necklace. Each statement is as sweet as it is simple and as precious as it is profound. All three taken together form a deep mine of revealed truth, in which we find ore more precious than gold.

About Himself

Here’s the first pearl. — The Lord Jesus makes a statement about himself. He says in verse 35, — *“I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”*

The Bread of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent to redeem us from the curse of the law and death by sin. That typical bread had no power against even physical death. All who ate that bread in the wilderness died; but Christ is the true bread. He bestows eternal life. He says, *“I am the Bread of Life.”* He is the great God, Jehovah, the *“I AM!”* He is the Bread that came down from God. He is the Bread that gives spiritual and eternal life. And he is the Bread that nourishes and sustains that life.

Our Lord would have us know that he himself is the appointed and necessary food for man’s soul. The soul of every man is naturally starving and famishing because of sin. Christ is given by God the Father to be the Satisfier, the Reliever, and the Physician of man’s spiritual need. In him and his mediatorial offices, in him and

his atoning death, in him and his priesthood, in him and his grace, love, and power, in him alone empty souls find their needs supplied. In him alone there is life. He is *“the Bread of life.”*

- Bread is used in Scripture to represent that food that is necessary, the food that sustains life, and the food that satisfies hunger. That is Christ our Savior. We must have him, or we will die in our sins.
- Bread is food that suits all. Some cannot eat meat, and some cannot eat vegetables. But all like bread. It is food both for the rich and the poor. So is it with Christ. He is just the Savior that meets the needs of every class.
- Bread is food we need daily. Other foods we may eat only occasionally. But we want bread every morning and evening in our lives. So is it with Christ. There is never a day in our lives that we do not need his blood, his righteousness, his intercession, and his grace. Well may he be called, *“The Bread of Life!”*

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah, whom God sent into the world, to quicken those that are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), and to give eternal life *“to as many as the Father hath given him.”* If we would have this life, we must come unto him. We must eat this Bread.

Do you know anything of spiritual hunger? Do I? Do we feel anything of craving and emptiness in conscience, heart, and affections? Let us distinctly understand that Christ alone can relieve and supply us, and that it is his office and work to do so. We must come to him by faith. We must believe on him. We must commit our souls into his hands. So coming, he pledges his royal word that we shall find lasting satisfaction both for time and eternity in him. It is written, — *“He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”*

About His People

Here’s the second pearl. — Our blessed Savior makes a statement about his people. In verse 37 the Son of God makes a broad, unconditional, unqualified, completely unguarded promise. — *“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”* What a great promise that is!

What do those words *“cometh to me”* mean? They refer to that movement of the soul that takes place when a sinner, feeling his sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all the weight of his immortal soul on Christ, trusting Christ alone for his complete salvation. When that happens, a man is said, in Scripture language, to *“come”* to Christ. — Coming to Christ is believing on Christ.

What did our Lord mean by saying, *“I will in no wise cast him out”*? He meant that he will not refuse to save anyone who comes to him, no matter what he may have been. Your past sins may have been very many and very great. Your present sins may be very many and very great. Your weakness and infirmity may be very great. But if you come to Christ by faith, Christ promises to embrace you and promises to keep embracing you forever! He will receive you graciously, pardon you freely, place you in the number of his dear children, and give you everlasting life. He will receive all who come to him; and he will never cast out any who come for any reason or upon any condition.

“I will in no wise cast him out!” — These are golden words indeed! They have softened many a dying pillow, and calmed many a troubled conscience. Let them sink down deeply into our hearts, and abide there continually. A day will come when flesh and heart shall fail, and the world can help us no more. Happy shall we be in that day, if the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we have come to Christ.

About God’s Will

Here's the third pearl. — Our Lord Jesus, in verse 40, gives us a very clear statement about the will of God, a statement by which he clearly reveals the will of God. Three times in verses 38-40 our Savior speaks of the will of God, our Heavenly Father.

“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. 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.”

1. He tells us that he was sent to do the will of God (v. 38). Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:1-14); and he identifies the will of God as the salvation of his people.

The Son of God came into this world in our flesh to do the Father's will. The will of the Father and the will of the Son are one. — *“I and my Father are one”* (John 10:30). But the Son is speaking here as Jehovah's Servant (Isaiah 42:1-4). The design of God in redemption is to have a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells perfectly and forever, to have a holy people (all like Christ) to populate that new creation, and to judge and destroy all things contrary to himself. This Christ came to do; and this he shall do (Isaiah 53:10-11.).

2. Our Savior tells us that it is his Father's will that he lose none of those who were given and trusted to him, and for whom he was trusted in the everlasting covenant (v. 39).

The Lord Jesus speaks of a definite company of people who have been given to him by the Father in an everlasting covenant of grace. He refers to this blessed company six times in John 17 (see verses 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24). Each one that the Father gave to the Son in eternity past comes to him in time as a lost sinner to be saved. He will never forget them, forsake them, nor cast them out (John 10:24-30).

Eternal election and eternal predestination guarantee eternal preservation. Our Savior declares that it is the sovereign will of God that all elected by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and called by the Spirit shall be raised from the grave to eternal glory, and that not one shall be lost. Our salvation, security, and resurrection rest not upon anything in us or anything done by us, but entirely upon the Father's choice, the Son's obedience and sacrifice, and the Spirit's operations of grace (Philippians 3:10-11, 20-21).

3. The Lord Jesus declares 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”* (v. 40).

This verse speaks of the same people referred to in the previous verses: — God's elect. But election alone is not salvation. Election is unto salvation. Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Yet, he must come to earth and die, if we are to be saved. Even so, the elect were chosen to life in eternity; but they must be saved in the experience of grace in time. All the chosen must hear the gospel (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). Each one must have Christ revealed to him. Each must see Christ for himself by faith as his righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Each must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with a sincere heart (John 3:18, 36; Romans 10:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6). And all this great host of sinners, chosen, redeemed, and called, shall be preserved through all the events of providence, trials of faith, temptations of Satan, and their countless falls, and shall be raised up in glory at the last day (Jude 24-25; Philippians 3:20-21). — Because this is the will of God!

Our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will never allow any soul that comes to him to be lost and cast away. He will keep us safe in grace and unto glory, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Not one bone of his mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of his flock shall ever be left behind in the wilderness.

He will raise to glory, in the last day, the whole flock entrusted to his charge; and not one shall be found missing.

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)

Freewill Crushed — Freegrace Exalted

“The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. 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? 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. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of 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. 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.” (John 6:41-51)

There is a hideously ugly monster, a beast that has risen up in the world, whose hide I would like to see nailed to the wall in every church building in the world. This beast has been around for a long, long time. We read about him in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 11:7; 13:1-4, 11-12, 14-15, 17-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:3, 7-8, 11-13, 16-17; 19:19-20; 20:4, 10). He arose from the sea, the pagan, idolatrous, gentile world. He has many names; but his name is always “*Blasphemy*.” He always ascribes to man the work of God. He is found in every part of the world, having “*seven heads*.” He is very powerful, having “*ten horns*.” He is found in high places, wearing “*ten crowns*.” He is deceitful, like a leopard. He is destructive, walking through the forests of darkness with the feet of a bear. He is furious, devouring with the mouth of a lion. Multitudes have perished by him. But his number is “*the number of a man*” —666, assuring us that he shall meet with frustration, failure, and defeat.

This beast must be slain. And he will be slain, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God. He will be slain by the preaching of the gospel.

Though the Philistines propped him up again and again Dagon their god fell on his face before the ark of God, with his hands broken off his arms and his head broken off his body. So, too, free-will must fall before our Savior. As the ark of God was exalted as Dagon lay in the dirt before it, so when Christ is exalted, free-will will be laid in the dirt before him. As Dagon and the ark of God could not abide in the same house, so free-will and free grace cannot abide together. One or the other must be pushed out of the house. In the house of God faithful men make it their business to push free-will out of the house, to throw it in the dirt before our God, trample it beneath our feet, and cast it out.

Idolatry

Nothing in all the world is more foolish, more debasing to humanity, more dishonoring to God, and more assuredly damning to the souls of men than idolatry. It is pathetic to see men and women worship gods that other men have made, dumb gods, made by the hands of ignorant men. Idolatry is hideously evil (Psalm 115:4-8). But the most abominable form of idolatry in the world is that which Paul calls “*will worship*,” the worship of yourself (Colossians 2:23). Those who attribute salvation in whole or in part to the will, work, or worth of man are the most abominably evil idolaters in the world, for they worship themselves. Freewillism is the worship of self. Legalism is the worship of self. Freewill works religion makes man his own savior, for it makes the will, work, or worth of man the determining factor in salvation.

If your salvation, in whole or in part, is looked upon by you as something that is dependent upon or determined by your will or your works, you are a lost, Christless soul, an idolater. You may talk about God and

grace, Christ and redemption, the Holy Spirit and regeneration; but you really worship yourself. You trust in your own decision. Your confidence is in your personal goodness. Your peace is derived not from what Christ has done, but from what you have done. Redemption is something accomplished for us altogether outside ourselves. Our hope is outside of us, not in our experience, but in God's Son. But in your opinion the thing that separates you from the damned is not the will of God, the work of Christ, and the call of the Spirit, but your own will, your own work, and your own worth. If I have described you and your religion, I want to go directly into the dark, idolatrous chambers of your heart and destroy your gods.

Gospel truths of the greatest magnitude and importance follow each other in rapid succession in this chapter. I am sure that there is much more in the chapter than has yet been declared; but I call your attention to just five things in these verses.

A Gin to Entrap

First, we see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in verses 41 and 42. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord Jesus, that one who would be born of a virgin, the Messiah, would be to many a gin and a snare, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (Isaiah 8:14-15); and so it has come to pass (vv. 41-42). He who is our Savior, the Sanctuary in whom we take refuge and hide, is to others a gin and a snare, by which their souls are snared, entrapped, and carried away to hell (Romans 9:30-10:4; 1 Peter 2:7-8).

Because he very simply and very plainly declared himself to them, because he said in no uncertain terms, "*I am the bread which came down from heaven,*" because he said, "I am the Christ," the Jews began to murmur. They stumbled at that which rejoices the hearts of God's elect. They murmured against the very thing we find most delightful. Why? What is the difference between them and us? It is the difference God has made by his distinguishing grace (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Our Lord's humiliation, the very fact that he made himself of no reputation, while he was upon earth, is a stumbling-block to many. Like these Jews, multitudes today say, "*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he says, I came down from heaven?*" Had our Lord come as a conquering king, with wealth and honors to bestow on his followers and mighty armies in his train, they would have been willing enough to receive him. But a poor, lowly, suffering Messiah was an offence to them. Their pride refused to believe that such a one was sent from God.

That should not surprise us. It is human nature showing itself in its true colors. We see the same thing in the days of the Apostles. Christ crucified was "*to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*" (1 Corinthians 1:23). The cross of Christ was an offence to many wherever the gospel was preached in that day; and the same thing is true today. The offense of the cross has not ceased. There are multitudes of religious people who despise the distinctive doctrine of the gospel, because the doctrine of the cross is humbling to man. Most everyone approves of Christ's exemplary service to others; but they despise the expiation of sin by his blood. They love to talk about what they call his "moral principles;" but they cannot tolerate blood atonement, penal substitution and the satisfaction of justice by his sacrifice. His self-denial they admire; but his doctrine they despise.

Speak to the religionists of this world about Christ's blood, about Christ being made sin for us, about Christ's death being the corner-stone of our hope, about his poverty being our riches, about his obedience being our righteousness, about his death being our life, and you will discover that they hate these things with a deadly hatred; and they will show their hatred for you, if you dare assert them. The offense of the cross is not yet ceased.

Human Inability

Second, our Lord plainly declares in verse 44 the utter inability of man, man's complete helplessness and inability to believe on him. — *"No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."* Until the Father draws the heart of man by his grace, man will not believe.

It is too obvious to need comment that coming to Christ is merely another word for believing on Christ. It is not a physical, but a spiritual coming to Christ that is necessary and saving. But this coming is impossible to man. Our Savior says, *"No man can come unto me."* That is to say, "No man has the ability to come unto me." No man in his natural state can come to Christ — *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"* (Romans 8:7).

Fallen man has neither the power nor the will to come to Christ. Man is dead in trespasses and in sins. He has no power to give himself life. He is spiritually impotent. Blind, he sees no need to come to Christ. Walking in darkness, he cannot know the way. Unregenerate, his heart is set on other things.

Men boast and brag about their will. Men everywhere, papists, pagans and Pentecostals, Buddhists, Brahmanists and Baptist, Methodists, Moravians and Mennonites all love to talk about man's "free will." All defend the doctrine of man's "free will." Even atheistic philosophers defend the blasphemous notion of "free will."

But our Lord makes it plain that man's problem is his will. What is man's inability? It is not a physical inability that keeps sinners from Christ. It is not a moral inability that keeps them from coming to the Lord Jesus. It is the very will of man that keeps him from the Savior. It is his corrupt will that holds him in bondage. Sinners cannot come because they will not come; and they will not come because they cannot come.

No man can come to Christ by nature because faith is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit. A new nature must be put in you, or you cannot come. A new heart must be put in you, or you cannot come. A new creation must be performed in your soul by God the Creator, or you cannot come. Unto you it must be given by God the Holy Spirit to believe on Jesus Christ, or you cannot come (Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:10-15).

Yet, inability is no excuse for unbelief. The fact is sinners do not come to Christ because they do not want to come to him. You are responsible for your own soul. Your inability to come to Christ does not make you any less responsible. If you are lost at last, it will be your own fault. If you go to hell, you will go to hell, as our Savior said, because *"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life"* (John 5:40). Your blood will be on your own head.

Divine Efficacy

Third, our Lord sets before us the divine efficacy of God's free, sovereign, saving grace in him. He shows us this great efficacy in three things:

- The Drawing of the Father (v. 44).
- The Teaching of the Father (v. 45).
- And the Revelation of the Father (v. 46).

If ever you are saved, if ever you come to Christ, you must be drawn to him by God's sovereign, irresistible grace, drawn to him by the irresistible force of his grace. — *"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"* (v. 44). Oh, what a blessed "except!" — *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him!"* And if the Father draws you to the Savior, you will come to him. We know that because he says, *"and I will raise him up at the last day!"*

The word “draw” suggests the idea of someone drawing water out of a well. No one begs and pleads for the water to get into the bucket! No, if you go to the well to get water, you reach down and, by an act of your own strength, you act upon the water, dipping the bucket in and pulling the water up to yourself. In the same way, sinners are drawn to Christ. God sends his Spirit to the chosen, redeemed sinner. God performs a work on and in the poor, lost, spiritually dead sinner, called “regeneration,” or “the new birth.” And God graciously draws the object of his mercy to Christ.

This word “draw” is used in a few other places in the New Testament. Everywhere it is used, we see the same thing. It implies force and coercion. It never implies or suggests an invitation or even an urging. In Acts 16:19 those who were enriched by the demon-possessed girl “*caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers.*” In Acts 21:30 the Jews “*took Paul, and drew him out of the temple...and...went about to kill him.*” They weren’t begging and pleading with Paul. They drew him. They forcibly drug him. In James 2:6 we are warned to beware of rich men who draw believers before the judgment seats. Again, the word does not suggest an invitation, but an irresistible force. God the Holy Spirit effectively and successfully draws the chosen, redeemed sinner to Christ. There are no exceptions. The call of God is always irresistible, effectual, and saving.

Look at verse 45. If you are saved, you must be taught of God; and all who are taught of God come to Christ and are saved by Christ. — “*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*” Read Isaiah 54:13, Jeremiah 31:34 and in Micah 4:2.

“*They shall be all taught of God.*” — All who are ordained to eternal life, all who were given to Christ and are chosen in him, all for whom he died and obtained eternal redemption, all the children of God by special adoption and grace, sooner or later, shall be taught of God. Read on. — “*Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*” — God’s teaching is always effectual. Our Lord did not say, “Every man that hath heard and learned of the preacher comes unto me.” He said, “*Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me.*” Everyone who hears the voice of the Father’s mercy, love, and grace in the gospel learns of him the way of life and peace and salvation by Christ. All who are taught of God, by the sweet force of his grace, come to Christ. Every sinner who is taught of God, hearing his declarations and promises of grace in Christ, ventures his soul on Christ and commits it to him, trusting him, relying on his person, his blood, his righteousness and his sacrifice, for peace, pardon, justification, atonement, acceptance with God, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life.

If ever you come to Christ, it will be because he, as the God-man Mediator, has become the Revelation of God, the Word of God to you. — “*Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father*” (v. 46). As Joseph Hart put it...

“A form of words, though e’er so sound,
Can never save a soul;
The Holy Ghost must give the wound,
And make the wounded whole.

Though God’s election is a truth,
Small comfort there I see,
Till I am told by God’s own mouth,
That He has chosen me.

That Christ is God I can avouch,
And for His people cares,

Since I have prayed to Him as such,
And He has heard my prayers.

That sinners black as hell, by Christ
Are saved, I know full well;
For I His mercy have not missed,
And I am as black as hell.

Thus, Christians glorify the Lord,
His Spirit joins with ours,
In bearing witness to His Word,
With all His saving powers.”

Faith's Assurance

In verse 47, our blessed Savior gives a word of sweet assurance to faith. Here it is. — *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”* — If you find yourself believing on the Lord Jesus, you already possess eternal life. Faith does not cause you to have it. Faith is the assurance that you have it, the assurance that you are chosen of God, redeemed by Christ, called by the Spirit, taught of God, and born again ((Hebrews 11:1; 1 John 5:1).

This salvation is a present thing, a present possession that lasts forever and can never be taken away, lost, or destroyed. — *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”*

Many seem to think that forgiveness and acceptance with God are things which we cannot attain in this life, that they are things which are to be earned by a long course of mourning and anguish, things we may receive at the bar of God at last, but must never hope to enjoy in this world. That is horribly wrong. Our Savior says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life!”* If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your name is in the book of life, your sins are blotted out, and you have a clear title to heaven. Neither Satan, nor hell, nor even you can alter or overthrow the work of God! — *“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).

Bread for the Hungry

Then, lastly, our blessed Savior, by the most simple picture imaginable, declares himself to be the Bread of Life, Living Bread for hungry souls.

“I am that bread of 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.) 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” (vv. 48-51).

Salvation is to be had only by feeding on Christ, only by trusting his obedience unto death as our Substitute; and that is exactly how we must live upon him. — *“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him”* (Colossians 2:6). As bread is the staff of life for the body, so Christ, the Bread of Heaven, is the life of the soul. And, as the body cannot subsist without daily food, so neither can the soul subsist without Christ, the Bread of Life. — *“Lord, evermore give us this Bread!”*

A Hard Saying *or* Sweet Bread to Eat

“I am that bread of 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. 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. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat? 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. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard [this], said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:48-60)

In the 6th chapter of John’s Gospel, after feeding five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two small fish, our Lord Jesus amassed a huge following. The multitude that followed him did not trust him. They were not converted. They just wanted more religious excitement. They wanted to see more miracles. And they wanted more free bread (v. 26).

In verses 27-36 the Lord Jesus taught these men and women the necessity of faith, the necessity of trusting him. Then he proclaimed to them, and proclaims to us the blessed freeness and certainty of everlasting salvation to all who trust him (vv. 37-40).

In verses 44-47 the Master declares the utter inability of man and the blessed, sovereign efficacy of God’s free, saving grace. Then, beginning in verse 48 the Lord Jesus declares himself to be the Bread of Life and explains that faith in him, trusting him, is like eating bread and living by the bread eaten.

After all that, after seeing the miracle, after eating the loaves and fish, after hearing the Savior’s discourse about the necessity of faith, the freeness and certainty of God’s salvation, the inability of man and the efficacy of God’s saving grace, after the Lord Jesus uses the simple eating of bread to illustrate what faith is, we read in verse 60 — “*Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*”

Here are five statements that will summarize our Lord’s doctrine in our text. These five things to the unbelieving are hard, offensive things. To the believer, they are sweet, delightful things.

1. Jesus Christ our Savior is God.

We see this very clearly stated in verse 48, where the Lord Jesus says, “*I AM the Bread of Life.*” With those two words, “*I AM,*” He points us back to Exodus 3:13-14, where Moses asked the Lord God, who spoke to him out of the bush, “*What is thy name?*” The answer was, “*I AM.*” When our Savior said, “*I am that Bread of Life,*” he used the title “*I AM*” to identify himself as the great Jehovah, who appeared to Moses in the bush, plainly asserting his eternal Deity.

Remember, the purpose of John’s Gospel is to show us the glorious divinity of our blessed Savior (John 1:1-3; 14:9). It should not be surprising to us that John was inspired to record our Lord’s use of “*I AM*”

throughout this Gospel narrative to identify himself as God (John 6:35, 48-58; 8:12; 10:9, 11, 14-16, 36, 33; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6-9; 15:1-10; 18:37, 49; 19:19-22).

- “*I AM the Bread of Life*” (6:35, 48-58). — “*If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.*” — Christ is the true and only Bread that not only gives, but also upholds and maintains spiritual, eternal life. He is the Bread which every sinner needs and without which all will perish.
- “*I AM the Light of the World*” (8:12). — He who follows Christ, the Light, no longer walks in the darkness of tradition, superstition, idolatry, and sin, but rather walks in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.
- “*I AM the Door*” (10:9). — Christ is the only Door of entrance into the kingdom of God. He is the Door of the sheep. And all who enter in by him shall be saved.
- “*I AM the Good Shepherd*” (10:11, 14-16). — The good Shepherd gave his life for his sheep, knows his sheep, gathers his sheep, and keeps his sheep.
- “*I AM the Son of God*” (10:36). — Thus the man Christ Jesus asserted his divinity, his eternity, the plurality of Persons in the Godhead, and the unity of the divine Persons; and the Jews to whom he spoke understood him perfectly (10:33).
- “*I AM the Resurrection*” (11:25). — Those who believe on him shall never die.
- “*I AM He*” (13:19) — He of whom the prophets spoke, whose name is I AM, who came to save his people (18:49).
- “*I AM the Way.*” — Without him we cannot come to God.
- “*I AM the Truth.*” — Without him we cannot know God.
- “*I AM the Life*” (14:6). — Without him we cannot live before God.
- “*I AM the Vine*” (15:1-10). — We are the branches. The branches bear fruit of the Vine. But in order to bear fruit, they must be pruned and must abide in the Vine.
- “*I AM King*” (18:37; 19:19-22). — He is King everywhere, over all things, forever. He must reign! The Father decreed it. He deserves it. And all his saints desire it and delight in it.

Jesus Christ is God our Savior, Jehovah incarnate, over all God, blessed forever!

2. Christ is the Bread by which we live.

“*Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead*” (v. 49). — The manna in the wilderness was typical of and portrayed Christ, just as the Rock which gave forth water was a type of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Neither the manna nor the water that flowed from that Rock had any saving benefit or efficacy, even to give or maintain physical life, let alone spiritual, eternal life. Those who ate the manna and drank the water died physically; and, evidently, many perished eternally, though they ate that bread and drank water out of the Rock, for they entered not into Canaan (Hebrews 3:17-19).

Christ is the Bread of God. — The Bread that comes from God and the Bread that satisfies God (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He is the Bread given by God, the gift of God (1 Corinthians 9:15). He is the living Bread and the Bread of Life. He is Life; and he gives life; and we live by him. He is sweet Bread and satisfying Bread. (John 6:32-35).

3. Before we could live, Christ had to die.

“*This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die*” (v. 50). — If a man eats of the Bread of Life, he has life eternal. He shall never die. Eating Christ, the Bread of Life, is believing on him, receiving him by faith. Believing on Christ is expressed by eating, because eating is the reception of food into our bodies for the sustenance of physical life; so receiving Christ by faith is drawing life from him.

We do not get life by eating bread; but we draw from the bread we eat that by which life is sustained, by which we grow, by which we are nourished, and by which we are strengthened. So it is with spiritual, eternal life. We do not get life by faith in Christ. Faith is the result of life. But we draw life from Christ by faith. Faith is believing on the Son of God, trusting the Lord Jesus, entering in by Christ the Door, coming to Christ the Lamb, bowing to Christ the King, laying hold on Christ our Hope, eating Christ the Bread of Life, drinking from Christ the Fountain, building on Christ the Foundation, looking to Christ the Savior. But we could never draw life from Christ had he not first died as our Substitute. He became to us living Bread by dying in our stead — *“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”* (v. 51).

Bread is made from the flour of corn, rye, barley, wheat, or some other grain. The grain has to be thrashed and sifted, ground and sifted, sifted and kneaded, and baked before it is suitable food for the table. — Thus, *“It behooved Christ to suffer”* (Luke 24:46).

He who is our Savior, the Life-giving Bread of God, is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, by whom we live. The *“flesh and blood of the Son of man”* refer to the sacrifice of his own body upon the cursed tree, when he died for his elect. Those words speak of the atonement made by his obedience unto death, the satisfaction made by his sufferings as our Substitute, the redemption accomplished by his enduring the penalty of the law and justice of God for our sins in his own body on the tree. It is only by the crucified Lamb of God that we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Hebrews 10:18-22).

4. Faith in Christ is an intensely personal thing, a spiritual act of the heart.

It is written, *“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness”* (Romans 10:9-13). But these Jews, like Nicodemus, were trying to interpret spiritual things in a carnal sense (John 3:4). — *“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* (v. 52)

Multitudes there are today who, like those Jews at Capernaum, vainly seek to make faith in Christ and the worship of God carnal things. Multitudes ignorantly imagine that eternal life can be obtained by carnal means. Papists teach that our Lord is here talking about eating the bread and wine of what they call “the eucharist,” or “holy communion,” which by some religious mumbo jumbo is transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Many Protestants, who vigorously denounce the heresies of Rome, teach essentially the same heresy, telling men that they spiritually eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in what they call the “sacrament” of the Lord’s Supper. Religious fundamentalists make salvation to be nothing more than a logical decision, repeating a scripted prayer, walking a church aisle, or saying, “I believe in Jesus.”

Man tries hard to make religion a matter of forms and ceremonies, of doing and performing, of sacraments and ordinances, of sight and of sense. Fallen man despises that which is truly spiritual, that which makes the heart the principal thing. Man labors to keep everything on his own level, carnal, fleshly, material, earthly. Ever beware of the influence of Rome. It is always evil. It is never good. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ordinances of God, prescribed and instituted by our Savior. They are blessed, blessed means of worship; but they are not “sacraments.” — They are not means of grace.

The *“eating and drinking,”* without which there is no life in us, is the believing reception of Christ and his sacrifice, which takes place when a sinner trusts Christ crucified as his Savior. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart and has nothing to do with the body. Whenever a sinner, feeling his own guilt and sin, lays hold on Christ, trusting his righteousness and his sin-atonement blood, he *“eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks his blood.”* His soul feeds on Christ’s sacrifice by faith, just as his body would feed on bread. Believing, we *“eat.”* Believing, we *“drink.”* And that which we eat and drink, and from which we benefit, is the atonement made for our sins by Christ’s death in our room and stead on Calvary. We eat his flesh, the righteousness of the incarnate God our Savior. We drink his blood, his justice satisfying, sin-atonement blood. Just as believer’s

baptism portrays the fulfillment of all righteousness by the obedience of Christ, the Lord's Supper portrays our faith in the obedience of Christ as our Mediator unto death.

“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. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:53-54)

The decree of God in predestination does not make the work of God in time meaningless, but only guarantees that it shall be done. And that which God did in eternity does not make his work in time unnecessary. What God did in eternity simply made certain that it would come to pass in time. Though our Lord Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, still he had to come to earth and die. The decrees of God do not make the accomplishments of Christ in time unnecessary. Even so, while Christ has been given a people and has redeemed them by his life and death, a people saved by him from eternity (Romans 8:29), they must hear the gospel and believe (John 6:37-44; Romans 10:13-15). Christ must be received and believed or you will have no life!

You must trust the Son of God. Just as no one can eat and drink for you, no one can believe for you. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. — “Just as there was no safety for the Israelite in Egypt who did not eat the passover-lamb, in the night when the first-born were slain, so there is no life for the sinner who does not eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.” (J. C. Ryle)

Trusting Christ, I have eternal life now; and I shall have it forever in resurrection glory. — “*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*” (1 John 5:1). It is not how much faith I have, but whom I believe that matters. That is exactly what our Savior tells us in verse 55. — “*For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*”

Paul said, “*I know whom I have believed.*” It is not just eating that nourishes a man. You get nourishment only if you eat the right food. If you eat poison, you will die. The same thing is true spiritually. Christ's flesh (obedience) is true life-giving meat; and his blood (death) is saving, cleansing blood. It is not what I think of myself that matters, or even what you think of me. It is, “*What think ye of Christ?*” That's the only thing that matters. It is not my standing before you that gives me peace, but my standing in Christ. He is able to present us faultless before the presence of his glory. It is not my ability to keep the law that determines my eternal destiny, but Christ's fulfillment of the law for me. — “*Christ is the END of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth!*” It is not my being free from sin that gives me free access to God, but Christ's being free from sin. — And in Him, I am free from sin (1 Peter 4:1-2). It is not my mourning, groaning, and suffering under the load of sin that appeases and satisfies a holy God, but the fact that Christ groaned and suffered under the weight of my guilt and sin. — “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*” (1 Peter 3:18). I am not accepted by my best effort. — I am “*accepted in the Beloved!*” And it is not my ability to keep myself that sustains me in faith, and grace, and hope, but his ability to keep me. — “*We are kept by the power of God through faith!*” — “*He is able to keep you from falling!*”

5. The life we live by faith in Christ is a life that is inseparable from Christ's own life.

“He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.” (John 6:56-59)

Our blessed Savior here declares that the life we have in him is a living, vital union with him (John 15:1-5). Just as Christ the God-man, our Surety, our Mediator lives by the Father, beside the Father, and with the Father, we live by Christ, beside Christ, and with Christ. Just as Christ cannot be separated from the Father, we cannot be separated from the Savior. We dwell in him; and he dwells in us.

God's elect enjoy the most intimate union, communion, and fellowship possible with Christ (Galatians 2:20). His existence, fulness, and completion as our Mediator is inseparable from ours (Colossians 2:10); and our existence is inseparable from his. He partook of our nature; and we are made partakers of his nature. — *"Partakers of the divine nature!"* He has his being with us from eternity; and we have our being with him from eternity. As the Father and Son are one, we are one in the Son. — *"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me"* (John 17:23). What he has done, we have done. What he has, we have. And where he is, we are!

"Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (v. 60) — To some who hear it the very simplicity of the gospel is *"a hard saying."* But to others the message preached, the Christ proclaimed is sweet Bread for the soul, sweet Bread to eat. May God the Holy Spirit make Christ our Savior the Bread of Life to you. O Holy Spirit, cause sinners here to hunger for Christ; and feed every hungry soul with the Bread of Life.

“From that Time”

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard [this], said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? [What] and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, [they] are spirit, and [they] are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that [time] many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. 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 6:60-71)

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (v. 66). — Note those words, *“from that time.”* — This was a time of great importance in the history of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It was a time when the vast majority of those who had been following our Lord forsook him. They wanted a miracle, but not a master. They wanted a wonder worker, but not a sovereign Savior. This was a time of great importance to the Jewish nation. God’s Messiah had come. The law and the prophets were being fulfilled before their very eyes. God himself assumed human flesh and dwelt among men. But he was despised, rejected, and hung up to die upon a cross. Therefore, God removed all light from that nation, left it desolate, and destroyed it. And this proved to be a time of great importance to the church and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her first real trial had come. Just when she began to gain some influence and respectability among men, many who had joined themselves to her forsook her. — *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”* What was this time?

It was a time of declaration. Our Lord plainly declared the gospel to these men. He had told them many spiritual truths concerning himself and his kingdom. They were confused and offended by his doctrine. So many turned away and walked no more with him.

- He had declared God’s eternal purpose of grace (vv. 37-40).
- He had declared his own deity (v. 46).
- He had declared his divine sovereignty (v. 63).
- He had declared man’s inability (vv. 44, 63, 65).
- He had declared that salvation is the work of God alone: Election by God by the Father, Redemption by God the Son, and Regeneration by God the Holy Spirit
- He had declared that salvation comes by divine revelation.

Salvation is the gift of God. It is not what man does for God that saves his soul, but what God does for man. God alone can make you a new creature in Christ. God alone can give life to dead sinners. God alone can make you an heir of eternal glory.

This was a time of decision (vv. 53-54). These men must choose Christ and feed upon him, or they must choose the dry husks of empty ritualism and Judaism and drink from the polluted cistern of self-righteousness.

This was a time of defection (v. 66). Many of those who had followed Christ and professed to be his disciples forsook him. They went back to their old companions, to their own hearts’ lusts. They went back to their old, empty religion. They went back, and walked no more with the Lord Jesus. There are many who follow

Christ for a while, and afterwards turn away from him; but there are some who, clinging to Christ with a steadfast faith, cannot leave him; and the only difference between the two is the free, sovereign, distinguishing love, mercy and grace of God. There are some very obvious lessons in the passage we have before us. Yet, obvious as they are, they are lessons that are missed altogether by most. So read what is before you carefully, with your Bible open before you, and ask God the Holy Spirit to teach you.

1. **The doctrine of Christ is offensive to lost men.**

Both the religious and the irreligious are offended by the doctrine of Christ, specifically by the doctrine he taught in this 6th chapter of John's Gospel. We do not have to guess what that doctrine is (vv 60-65). It is the doctrine of salvation finished by Christ. Our Lord Jesus ascended up to heaven because he had finished his work. He had finished all he came to finish.

Another thing that offends men is the doctrine our Savior proclaimed in verse 63, the blessed declaration of the fact that **salvation can be obtained only by God's sovereign, quickening Spirit**. In every place there are some who believe and some who believe not; and the determination is altogether God's work. The matter is determined from eternity by God's decree in election (Acts 13:48; John 10:25), by Christ's accomplishments in redemption (Galatians 3:13-14), and by the Holy Spirit's effectual, irresistible grace and quickening power.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." — It was the Spirit that quickened the dead body of our crucified Substitute. His flesh did not quicken itself to life. It is the Spirit that makes the Word preached to have quickening power. — "The flesh profiteth nothing!" It is the Spirit that quickens the dead sinner. — "The flesh profiteth nothing!"

Another thing taught by our Savior is so offensive to proud man that none can or will receive it, as our Savior here declares it, except they be taught of God and quickened by the Spirit. That is the doctrine of man's utter inability in all things spiritual (vv. 63-65). No man can believe, except the Spirit quicken him. No man can understand the things of God, except the Spirit quicken him. No man can revive his languishing soul, except the Spirit quicken him. No man can keep himself from evil, except the Spirit quicken him. No man can restore himself when fallen, except the Spirit quicken him. — "*The flesh profiteth nothing!*"

2. **Many who seem to be Christ's disciples go back and walk no more with him.**

"*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*" — Many follow Christ for a time, but stumble when they hear that salvation involves a personal union of faith with Christ. Many in this passage were following Christ. They were evidently much taken with him. They called him a prophet. They wanted to make him a king. They followed him across the sea. Yet, when he told them that he is the Bread of Heaven, they murmured. When he told them that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life, they said, "*This is a hard saying;*" and it was for this reason they turned back, and walked no more with Jesus.

So it is now. Many there are who are much taken with Christ. They have some anxiety about their souls. They like to hear good sermons. But when they are pressed with the claims of the Son of God, when they are pressed to eat his flesh and drink his blood, they say, "That is a hard saying, who can hear it?"

Many follow Christ for a time; but when they are told that Christ must dwell in them, they stumble and fall. They go back, and walk no more with him. So it was here. The multitude that followed Christ was pleased with a great many things he did and said. When he fed them with the five barley loaves and the two fish, they said, "*Lord, it is good for us to be here...This is in truth that prophet that should come into the world.*" And when the Lord Jesus told them of bread from heaven that would give life, they said most devoutly: "*Lord, evermore give us this bread.*" But, when Christ said, "*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him,*" they were offended. When he told them that he would be their life, and would dwell in

them, they said, “*It is a hard saying, who can hear it?*” They believed not. They went back, and walked no more with Him.

So it is with many today. They cannot grasp how a man can be made a new creature. So they are stumbled by it. They are stumbled by the fact that all who are born of God are made partakers of the divine nature. They laugh and poke fun at the doctrine, stumbling down to hell in proud rebellion. When the Savior says, “*Ye must be born again...He that eateth me, even he shall live by me,*” they say, “*This is a hard saying, who can hear it?*” Many profess that they will follow Christ; but when they are plainly told that they must be drawn to Christ, that salvation is altogether by God’s free grace, they are offended.

How many there are who receive the word as seed sown upon stony ground where it is quickly scorched out by the sun of adversity, or among thorns where it is choked out by the weeds of earthly care, the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches!

3. Though many go back, blessed be God, those who are Christ’s cannot go back, because the Savior will not let us go back (vv. 67-69).

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv. 67-69)

True believers never quit the Savior. They cannot go back, because they are the objects of special love. When the crowd went away the Savior did not go after them. He spoke not a word. But when his own believing disciples thought themselves in danger of being led away, he speaks to them. — “*Will ye also go away?*” Will you whom I have chosen, you whom I have washed, you whom I have sanctified and filled with hopes of glory, “*will ye also go, away?*” Oh, how graciously Christ watches over his own! He is walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and his word is, “*I know thy works.*”

True believers cannot forsake Christ because they are heirs of an everlasting covenant that cannot be broken (Jeremiah 31:3, 31-34; 32:38-41). They cannot be lost because they are God’s elect. They cannot perish because Christ purchased them. They cannot go back because they are kept by God’s power and grace. They cannot go back because they are sealed by the Spirit. They cannot go back because God, who gives us eternal life and sustains it, cannot change.

Eternal life is the gift of God. Eternal life comes to men as a matter of free grace. Man does not have eternal life by nature. Eternal life does not evolve from man’s sinful heart by some mysterious process of “spiritual evolution.” It is given to men graciously. It is performed in the heart by the power of God’s sovereign grace. The very word “*gift*” forbids the idea that eternal life comes to men as a matter of debt or reward. — “*The gift of God is eternal life.*” There was nothing in our hearts or conduct which caused God to bestow eternal life upon us (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 2:1-4). And there is nothing in the believer’s heart or conduct which can cause God to take away his gift of eternal life (Isaiah 54:10; Psalm 89:30-36).

R. L. Dabney wrote, “God was not induced to bestow his renewing grace in the first instance by anything which he saw meritorious and attractive in repenting sinners; and therefore the subsequent absence of everything good in them would be no new motive to God for withdrawing his grace.”

It is contrary to the nature and character of God to take away his gifts so freely bestowed (Romans 11:29). This gift of eternal life is a gift freely bestowed, in no way dependent upon the contingencies of this present, mortal existence. If we acknowledge that eternal life is entirely the gift of God, in no way earned by or dependent upon the goodness of man, it must be concluded that those to whom eternal life is given are eternally secure in Christ (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Any child who has not been blinded by religious error must recognize that eternal life must of necessity be eternal. I realize that “*eternal life*” refers more to the quality of the believer’s life union with Christ than it does to the duration of his life. But it certainly implies a life of eternal duration. When our Lord says, “*eternal*,” he means eternal. How can life be eternal if it comes to an end? If I have received from God the gift of eternal life, it is not possible for me, by any act of mine, or upon any grounds, to lose it and perish. — “*The gift of God is eternal life.*”

That which is born of God, the new nature created in us by the power of God, cannot sin and cannot die (1 John 3:5-9).

The believer’s life must be eternal because it is a life in union with Christ. We who believe are so really and truly joined to Christ that we cannot possibly perish, unless he also perishes. We are truly one with Christ. He says, “*Because I live, ye shall live also.*” This union between Christ and his people is an immutable, indissoluble union. We are married to Christ (Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:30). We are members of Christ’s body, the church (Ephesians 1:23). Can you imagine Christ with a maimed body? Perish the thought! Yet, his body would not be complete if so much as one member were lost.

The believer’s life in Christ must be a life of eternal duration, because we are preserved in life by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit was sent into the world both to call and to preserve God’s elect. He is the Giver of life and the Preserver of life. The Spirit of God is the seal of the new covenant. That seal is a mark of ownership. A seal is that which keeps something legally secure. A seal suggests permanent freshness. A seal means everything is okay!

4. The true believer cannot go back because we have none to go to but Christ.

“*Thou hast the words of eternal life.*” — To unconverted minds the words of Christ are hard sayings. To his own they are tried and proven words, words of eternal life. The very thing that drives the world away from Christ draws his own disciples closer and closer to him. The world is offended when Christ says we must eat his flesh. That is a word of eternal life to the believer. The religionist goes away when he hears of Christ dwelling in the soul. The believer draws nearer and says, Lord, evermore dwell in me. The will-worshipper walks no more with him when he hears that salvation is altogether by grace. Believers bow in the dust and bless God, who alone makes him to differ from the reprobate. — “*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*”

“*We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*” — It is this confident conviction that he is our divine Savior that rivets the believing soul to Christ. If Christ were only a man like ourselves, how could he be a Surety for us? But we believe and are sure that he is the Son of the living God. We therefore know he is a sufficient Surety for us. To whom else can we go for pardon?

If Christ were only a man like ourselves, how could he dwell in us or give the Spirit to abide with us forever? But we believe and are sure that he is that Christ, the Son of the living God. Therefore we know he is able to dwell in us and put his Spirit in us forever. To whom, then, can we go for a new heart but unto Christ?

Have you thus been taught of God? Then blessed are you, “*for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in heaven.*”

5. Salvation is altogether the result of our Savior’s choice.

“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”

(vv. 70-71). — “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

6. Even the most evil deeds performed by men under the influence of hell itself are ordained and overruled by our great God for the salvation of his elect.

“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” (vv. 70-71).

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts 2:23)

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” (Psalms 76:10)

Let the Arminians, work-mongers, and will-worshippers of the world hoot and holler all they will; these things cannot be gainsaid. Those who denounce them denounce the Word of God. Those who despise them despise the God who reveals them, performs them, and attaches his glory to them (Ephesians 1:3-14). All who are taught of God believe God.

“Doth this offend you?”

“These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard [this], said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?”

(John 6:59-61)

John 6 is a record of the running controversy between the Lord Jesus Christ and lost religionists who wanted to eat the bread he alone could provide, but hated the doctrine he taught. After our Lord performed that great miracle of feeding 5,000 men with just five barley loaves and two small fish, the people began to flock to him in droves. But when he began to teach them the Word of God, when he began to preach to them the doctrine of the Gospel, they were offended. His doctrine was a stumbling stone and a rock of offense to lost religious people in that day; and things have not changed. The doctrine of Christ is still offensive to lost, religious men and women.

We read in the Scriptures that when the Lord Jesus preached, the people who heard him became so enraged that they picked up rocks and tried to stone him to death. And I tell you plainly that any man who dares to preach the Gospel of Christ today, as the Master himself preached it, will meet with the same response among unregenerate religious people.

In this chapter our Lord began his sermon in verse 26, where he rebuked the Jews, telling them that the only reason they followed him was that they wanted to see more miracles and eat more bread. The message ends in verse 58 with the promise of life eternal to all who trust the Lord Jesus Christ. After he brought his message, the people who heard him began to murmur. They said that’s too hard. — *“This is a hard saying, who can hear it?”* The Lord Jesus answered their quibbles by saying, *“Doth this offend you?”* Then he went on preaching, re-emphasizing what he had said before. He wanted to make sure they heard what he was saying (vv. 62-65).

When He got done, the whole crowd left him, all 5,000 men, their wives, and their children. Our Lord was not a crowd pleaser. Then he turned to the twelve disciples who remained with him and said, *“Will ye also go away?”* They stayed; but the crowd left. The crowd was offended by the Gospel. Every god they worshipped, every altar they cherished, every hope they clung to was being destroyed by Christ’s doctrine. And they said, *“We’ve heard enough of that. We will not listen to it anymore.”* And they walked away from the Gospel and went to hell, clinging to the traditions of their Christless religion.

The Gospel of the grace of God is just as offensive to unregenerate men and women today as it was to these people in John 6. It offended people then; and it offends people now. There is no way to make the Gospel inoffensive without denying it altogether. The Gospel of the grace of God will either bring people to Christ in repentance and faith, or drive them away from him in obstinate rebellion. It will either save those who hear it, or it will condemn them. But, blessed be God, the preaching of his free and sovereign grace in Christ will accomplish the purpose whereunto he sends it (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; Isaiah 55:11).

Seven Truths

I want to show you the doctrine of Christ, as it was preached by Christ himself in the Gospel of John. Later on in his second Epistle, John wrote, — *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son”* (1 John 9). Here are seven great foundation truths of the Gospel, which fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It cannot be denied that these seven things are the doctrine of Christ. They were taught by him. John heard them. And being inspired by the Spirit of God to do so, he wrote them down for our learning and admonition. They are offensive to the world, but they are honoring to God and full of comfort and joy for his people. Here are seven

things the Son of God taught when he walked and preached among men. And that which he taught, all who are his messengers in every generation faithfully teach as well.

1. Divine Sovereignty

Our Lord Jesus Christ preached the glorious sovereignty of God in the exercise of his grace.

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 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. 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 6:37-40)

Here we see God in his sovereignty. We see God’s will being done in the world. The Lord Jesus tells us that he came down here, appointed, delegated, set apart, and sent of God to accomplish his sovereign will. When the Lord Jesus Christ preached, he preached God on the throne as an absolute sovereign, who always does what seems good in his sight.

I know that men hate God’s sovereignty. It offends them. It makes all men and women paupers before the great and glorious Lord God, who does what he pleases, when he pleases, with whom he pleases. — “*None can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?*” (See Isaiah 14:24, 26 and 27.) Anytime a preacher dares take the crown off man’s head and puts it where it belongs, on God’s head, the fur begins to fly. You can count on it. But every man who is called of God to preach the Gospel will do just that, regardless of cost or consequence.

When I declare that God is sovereign, I mean that God really is God. Everything is determined by him, everything depends upon him, and everything is absolutely governed by him. The will and purpose of God is absolute and irresistible. God’s will determines all things and rules all things. Everything depends upon the will of God. Christ died by the will of God (Acts 2:23, Hebrews 10:1-14). Paul tells us that God “*worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*” (Ephesians 1:11). James says, “*If the Lord will, we will live and do this or that*” (James 4:15). John tells us, regarding the kings, princes, and nations of the world that “*God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will*” (Revelation 17:17). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said, “*I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will*” (1 Corinthians 4:19).

And when I say that God is sovereign, I am telling you that God almighty always saves sinners on his terms (Isaiah 45:22). If you are saved, you are saved because it pleased the Lord to save you. “*It pleased the Lord*” to make you his people (1 Samuel 12:22). “*It pleased the Lord*” to bruise his Son in the place of his people (Isaiah 53:9). “*It pleased the Lord*” to put all the fulness of grace and glory in Christ (Colossians 1:18). “*It pleased the Lord*” to reveal his Son in you (Galatians 1:15). “*It pleased the Lord*” to save sinners by the preaching of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Seminaries and Bible colleges deny God’s sovereignty. Preachers everywhere oppose it. Men who hate God hate it. But the Son of God preached it! “*Doth this offend you?*” It offends you only if you want to be God yourself.

2. Total Depravity

Remember, I am showing you the doctrine of Christ specifically as the Apostle John was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to present it in his Gospel narrative. Here in the Gospel of John, specifically in this 6th chapter, we

see the Lord Jesus Christ openly preaching the total depravity and inability of man (John 6:44). He's preaching to lost people about divine sovereignty, total depravity, election, and limited atonement!

“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 6:44)

“When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? [What] and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, [they] are spirit, and [they] are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. 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 6:61-65)

Our Lord preached God on the throne and man in the dust. He preached God exalted and man abased, God high and man low. Man was not always low; but sin has made him so. Ever since our father Adam fell in the garden, the sons of Adam have been wallowing in the mire of depravity. And Christ preached it that way. He said, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*” My Lord put man in a spiritual grave, unable to rise by his own strength, declared him an impotent thing on a cripple's bed, unable to walk, and on a blind man's stool, unable to see.

Men and women everywhere tell us we should not teach and preach these things, because they offend people. I am fully aware of that; but I would rather offend man than offend God. And when we preach and teach these glorious doctrines plainly and openly, we are following a good example. This is the doctrine of Christ. Is it not?

To preach free-willism and decisionism is to deceive the souls of men. Man can no more save himself than the demons of hell could save themselves. No man can ever be saved except by the omnipotent mercy, irresistible grace, and sovereign will of God. — “*Salvation is of the Lord*” in its planning, in its purchase, in its performance, in its preservation, and in its perfection.

“*Doth this offend you?*” If it does, it offends you only because you think you are good

3. Unconditional Election

The Lord Jesus Christ preached God's free, sovereign, eternal, unconditional election of some to salvation and eternal life in Christ. We just read that in verses 64 and 65. Because He knew from the beginning that they would believe not, the Savior says, — “*Therefore said I unto you, No man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father.*” It is the Son of God who said, “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you*” (John 15:16).

Election is a humbling doctrine, for it takes salvation completely out of man's hands. — “*Ye have not chosen me.*” Election is a clearly revealed and very prominent Bible doctrine. (Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). And election is a most blessed and comforting doctrine. It is our election that secures us from the delusions of antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2).

4. Blood Atonement

Our Savior preached blood atonement (John 6:54-57). People in his day resented the preaching of blood atonement as much as they do in our day. But he still preached it. The Son of God preached redemption by the blood (John 3:14-16).

- God's Blood (Acts 20:28)
- Holy Blood (Exodus 30:10)
- Precious Blood (1 Peter 1:18-20)
- God Spilt Blood (Zechariah 13:7)
- Saving Blood (Romans 5:9)
- Effectual, Sin- Atoning Blood (Hebrews 1:3; 9:12)

And the Son of God preached that his blood effectually made atonement for and redeemed a particular people called his sheep (John 10:11, 15, 25). The Lord Jesus Christ did not shed his blood in vain (Galatians 2:21). Our Redeemer preached salvation by blood atonement. Nothing but the blood could satisfy the justice of a holy God. Nothing but the blood can wash away my sin. There is no hope for sinners but the precious blood of Christ.

“Doth this offend you?” If it does, it offends you only because you have some other hope, only because you have made for yourself a *“refuge of lies.”*

5. Effectual Calling

The Son of God preached the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit. — *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). We preach the Gospel to all who hear us, calling all to Christ. But that general call of the Gospel is of no benefit to any who hear the Word preached, except it be made effectual in the heart by God the Holy Spirit in the effectual, irresistible call that brings chosen, redeemed sinners to the Savior (Psalms 65:4; 110:3).

All who are privileged to hear the Gospel preached are called externally by the preaching of the Gospel; but those who are saved, *“the called,”* have been called internally, effectually, and irresistibly by God the Holy Spirit. *“The called”* are like the Thessalonian saints. Their election, redemption, and calling are made manifest by the fact that the Word of God has come to them, not in word only, but in the power of the Holy Ghost¹. Salvation comes to chosen, redeemed sinners in the experience of grace by the almighty, irresistible, effectual call of God the Holy Spirit.

It is this call of which David sang, when he said, *“Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee.”* This is the call the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said, *“God separated me from my mother's womb, called me by his grace, and revealed his Son in me.”* Paul was talking about this internal, effectual call when he wrote to Timothy. — God *“hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles”* (2 Timothy 1:9-11).

“Doth this offend you?” If it does, it offends you only because you have never been called.

6. Certain Perseverance

¹ I remind you, there is no effectual call of grace apart from the preaching of the gospel. Yet, the preaching of the gospel will never produce life and faith in Christ without the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit.

And our Lord Jesus Christ preached the preservation and perseverance of every believer (John 10:27-30). Sheep are weak, helpless, defenseless creatures. They have no strength to withstand their enemies. If they are lost, they cannot find their way home again. If sick, they cannot fight off their disease. If threatened, they cannot run fast enough to escape danger. If attacked, they cannot defend themselves.

The only security sheep have is in their shepherd. If their shepherd is wise, good, and strong, they are secure. If the sheep survive, if they live and flourish, the honor belongs to the shepherd. If the sheep perish, the blame belongs to the shepherd. It is the shepherd's responsibility to keep the sheep. Knowing these things, those who are the Lord's sheep rejoice to hear him say, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.*"

The doctrine of our Lord in this text is very plain and obvious. We who believe are Christ's sheep: weak, helpless, defenseless creatures. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our Shepherd, wise, good, and strong. Because Christ is our Shepherd, we are secure in him. This is what the Son of God, our dear Shepherd, says concerning all his sheep. — "*They shall never perish!*" With those words, the Son of God declares the absolute, infallible, unwavering security of God's elect in himself.

"Once in Christ, in Christ forever,
Nothing from Him our souls can sever!"

Doth this offend you?" If it does, it offends you only because you think you can save yourself.

7. Salvation Full and Free

The Lord Jesus Christ preached salvation full and free to all who believe, to all who trust him.

"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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18)

"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)

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)

Salvation is in Christ. Salvation in Christ is free. This salvation that is in Christ is unconditional. And it is an everlasting, eternal salvation. The Son of God says, "*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.*"

"Doth this offend you?" If it does, it offends you only because you refuse to be saved by free grace alone. This is the doctrine of Christ. If it offends you, it offends you because you do not know or trust the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ's doctrine is your doctrine, be certain, child of God, that you do not assist those who oppose his doctrine in any way.

"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 1:9-11)

Why is Christ so hated?

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For [there is] no man [that] doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. 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. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 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 7:1-13)

The fact that our Lord Jesus Christ, while he walked through this world, was utterly hated by men is obvious. As soon as opportunity was given them, the princes of this world crucified the Lord of Glory. Why? — Why was Christ so hated? Why is the Son of God so hated today? The answer to that question is found in these thirteen verses of Holy Scripture.

This chapter opens with John’s declaration that the Jews sought to kill the Lord Jesus. He was so hated, so viciously despised that the Jews, that is the religious leaders among the Jews (the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests, the elders, etc.) were looking for a way to murder him, without appearing to have done anything contrary to the law of God.

The Jews’ Feast

The *first* thing that is obvious in this passage is the fact that multitudes have a form of godliness, who have no knowledge of God. Multitudes are religious, but lost. We read in verse 2 — “*Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand*” (v.2).

What scathing words of condemnation those are! The Divinely ordained Feast of Tabernacles is here referred to by the Spirit of God as “*the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles!*” This blessed ordinance of divine worship had so degenerated that it was no longer observed as an ordinance of divine worship, but as a custom of Jewish religious tradition.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast God commanded the children of Israel to keep on the 15th day of the seventh month of every year to celebrate his goodness to his people. After they had gathered in the fruits of the land, they were to dwell in tents for seven days in remembrance of the forty years spent in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:34-36, 39-44). The feast was the grand harvest festival, when the Lord of harvest was praised for his mercies.

This Feast of Tabernacles was a time when Israel was reminded that they dwelt in booths in the wilderness and God dwelt with them in the cloudy and fiery pillar. But it spoke of more than that. It foreshadowed that time when God came here and tabernacled in human flesh that he might at last bring God and man together in eternal glory and perfect fellowship, with sin and every evil consequence of it forever expiated, put away, purged, gone, and forgotten forever (Psalms 72:16-19; John 1:14; Revelation 21:1-7).

How sad, how horribly, horribly sad it is to see multitudes today doing exactly what the Jews in our Lord's day had done, — clinging to a form of godliness, while denying the power thereof, — clinging to outward ceremonies, while despising spiritual worship! Public worship is meaningless, unless it involves heart worship. Baptism is an empty ritual, unless you are baptized into Christ. The Lord's Supper is a worthless ceremony, unless Christ is held in the memory of the heart.

Let us ever seek grace from God the Holy Spirit to pray with the spirit and pray with the understanding also, to sing with the spirit and sing with the understanding also, to read with the spirit and read with the understanding also, to hear with the spirit and hear with the understanding also, to worship with the spirit and worship with the understanding also.

Impossible Faith

Second, we see in our Savior's brethren a glaring declaration of the fact that it is impossible for anyone to believe on the Son of God except by the call, gift, operation, and power of God the Holy Spirit. So obstinate, so desperately wicked, so great is the hardness and unbelief of human nature that we are plainly told, — "*Neither did his brethren believe in him*" (v. 5). Holy and harmless and blameless as he was in life, our Lord's nearest relatives, according to the flesh, did not receive him as the Messiah, did not trust him as their Savior, and did not worship him as the God-man Mediator. It was bad enough that his own people, "the Jews sought to kill him." But it was even worse that "*His brethren did not believe in him.*"

These "*brethren*" (vv. 3-5) were our Savior's earthly kinsmen (Matthew 12:46-47; 13:55). These "*brethren*" urged the Lord Jesus to go to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, and let his followers there see the mighty works and miracles he could perform. They thought that the Feast of Tabernacles would be a good time for him to demonstrate his powers, since multitudes of Jews would be in Jerusalem for the feast.

"*His brethren*" wanted the Lord Jesus to obtain fame, but cared nothing for the glory of God. They thought his fame would be to their advantage. They said, "If you want fame and notoriety you've got to put yourself in the lime light. Go to Jerusalem. Nobody will ever know who you are, if you only preach in these small country villages. — You've got to go to Jerusalem and there '*shew Thyself unto the world*'" (v. 4). These are the same "*his brethren*" who said in Mark 3:21, "*He is beside himself!*"

The fact is, with men, faith in Christ is an utter impossibility. So hard, so depraved is the heart of fallen man that our Lord's own kinsmen, though they lived constantly in his company, observed his day by day conduct, watched perfection live before them, saw his miracles and heard every word he spoke, did not believe in him. — His own kinsmen did not believe! The fact is earthly relations cannot secure God's grace. Grace does not run in any family. Faith comes only by Divine revelation. Faith is the gift of God, the fruit and the result of divine operations. Faith is born in the newborn soul in regeneration, brought forth by the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit, and is exercised by the Spirit of God in the heaven born soul.

The mere possession of spiritual advantages and privileges has no saving efficacy. All is useless without the irresistible grace and power of God the Holy Spirit. In John 6 our Lord Jesus said, "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father who has sent me draw him*" (John 6:44, 65).

We often hear people assigning blame to preachers and preachers assigning blame to church members for the lack of conversions in a place, as though we might be able to increase the number of God's elect, if we just did things differently. Do not be so foolish! Salvation is God's prerogative. — "*Salvation is of the Lord!*"

His Time

Third, we are reminded that everything comes to pass at God's appointed time. — *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Without question, everything connected with the incarnation, life, obedience, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was accomplished at his own divinely appointed time.

"Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come" (vv. 6-8).

The Lord Jesus refused to go up to the feast with his brethren at this particular time, because the time or hour was not yet come for him to publicly display his miracles in Jerusalem, to have a head-on confrontation with the religious leaders, to reveal himself as the Messiah and King, and so to stir up their enmity and fears of him, which would lead them to crucify him in open shame. He said to these brethren, *"Your time is always ready,"* or anytime is suitable for you; for you are of the world, and the world does not hate you. They had in mind, like everyone else, an earthly kingdom, great favor, and the applause of the world. But our Lord came to redeem a people, to condemn the social, political, and religious world in general. Therefore, he incurred the wrath of all. When the appointed time came, he showed himself and accomplished his death at Jerusalem (Romans 5:6-8). And everything connected with the salvation of his people is accomplished at his own appointed time of love (Galatians 4:4-6).

The World's Hatred

Fourth, our Lord Jesus tells us plainly in verse seven that he was hated by the world in which he lived simply because he showed that its works are evil. — *"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."*

He says to *"his brethren,"* his own kinsmen after the flesh, *"The world cannot hate you."* That makes it obvious that he is talking to men who are themselves very religious. They are discussing religious, theological, prophetic issues in this chapter. These are not drunks, profligate and morally degenerate derelicts. These men were, themselves, upstanding, conservative religious people. Yet, he says to them, *"The world cannot hate you."*

Obviously, *"the world"* in this context refers to the religious people of this world, or the religion of this world. He is referring to the self-righteous, works religion that is embraced, promoted, loved, and (to a greater or lesser degree) practiced by men everywhere. It may be called Islam, or Judaism, or Christianity, Animism, or Hinduism, or Atheism; but it is the religion of the world. It is embraced by men and women everywhere. And they are enraged when it is shown to be evil (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Our Savior here declares that the reason the world hated him so was *"because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."* And that which was true then is true today. It was so even from the beginning. Those things that men call good works, by which they hope they have God's favor, our God and Savior declares to be evil. That was the reason Cain murdered Abel.

The fact is, as John Calvin put it, "The Gospel cannot be faithfully preached without summoning the whole world, as guilty, to the judgment-seat of God, that flesh and blood may thus be crushed and reduced to nothing."

Exactly how did the Lord Jesus testify against these men, that their works were evil? He healed a man on the sabbath day, declaring that their sabbath observance was useless. He refused to practice their customs, refused to publicly wash his hands before eating, declaring that their religious customs were worthless human inventions. By his actions as well as his doctrine, the Lord Jesus exposed all their religious activity to be nothing but self-serving hypocrisy.

He preached the Gospel. He preached the necessity of a turning of men to God by God (repentance), the necessity of perfect righteousness, the necessity of complete atonement, the necessity of the new birth, and the necessity of divine preservation. All these things asserted plainly that religion without grace, religious activity without God the Holy Spirit, religious knowledge without faith in Christ is damning.

The world loves religion. It will embrace and be tolerant of every form of religion. It will demand respect for all religions, except the gospel of Christ. That, the world cannot receive. The gospel puts all sinners upon the same level, — in the dust of humiliation. The gospel puts all men in the hands of God. The gospel makes salvation God's work alone. The gospel strips man of all pride, honor, and distinction. And the gospel puts the crown on the head of the Triune Jehovah where it belongs.

Dividing Opinions

Fifth, we see in verses 10-13 that men everywhere are divided from one another by three very strong opinions about the Lord Jesus Christ.

“But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 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.”

Some say that Jesus was a good man. Others say he was a deceiver of men. Those two groups of people will always find some way or other to get along, like conservative and liberal politicians. But the third group they will not embrace. — Believers know and are sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only Savior of fallen men. — “*What think ye of Christ?*”

“Though all the world my choice deride,
Yet Jesus shall my portion be;
For I am pleased with none beside;
The fairest of the fair is He.”

Chapter 54

“Where is He?”

“Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he?” (John 7:11)

Some sought to take him and kill him. Others sought to take him and make him a king. Some sought to see his miracles. Others sought to hear his doctrine. Some sought him out of curiosity. Others sought him out of need. Everyone knew that the Lord Jesus would be in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. It was both his custom and his duty as an Israelite to come at this time to the house of God to worship God. Therefore everyone expected him to be there. Throughout the days of the feast, there was a murmuring about him. It seems that everyone at the feast was asking one question — “*Where is He?*”

When Elisha took up Elijah’s mantle, he cried, “*Where is the God of Elijah?*” (2 Kings 2:14). In his time of great trial, in the midst of his groaning and heaviness of heart, Job cried, “*Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat!*” (Job 23:3)

There are appointed places where the Lord Jesus Christ may be found by those who seek him with all their hearts. If you really want to find him, there are places where he may be found.

The Question of Many

First, this is a question asked by many people, from different circumstances, and for different reasons. Our text specifically tells us that the Jews asked, “*Where is He?*” But this is a question that has often been asked by numerous people throughout the ages of Christianity. In the days of his manhood upon this earth, many frequently asked where he was, because they hated him and wanted to kill him.

You will remember that King Herod asked this question of the wise men, when our Savior first came into the world. He pretended that he wanted to worship him; but he really wanted to destroy him (Matthew 2:1-13).

There have been multitudes, like Herod, who sought to destroy Christ, that is to destroy his people, his Gospel, and his cause in this world, while pretending that they worship him. Opposition and persecution arises from many quarters; but it is never so dangerous as when it comes from those who pretend that they are the Lord’s disciples. The persecutions of the papists, the heresies of freewillers and work-mongers, the slanders of false brethren are all assaults upon Christ, attempts to rid the world of him and his influence. Infidels, who sneeringly denying our Lord’s very existence, taunt and deride his people, saying, “*Where is He?*” — “*They are scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

This is a question that is sometimes asked by fearful, trembling believers. God’s saints are sometimes overcome with trials and troubles, with heartache and grief, that they question his presence, his power, his promises, and his providence. In such times of weakness, our hearts cry, “*Where is He?*” Job certainly did (Job 23:8-9). So did David (Psalms 22:1). We ought never to doubt our God and Savior. He is worthy of implicit trust and confidence. But we are often like the disciples in their little boat on the storm tossed sea, crying, “*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*” (Mark 4:38).

Penitent sinners humbly seek the Lord Jesus Christ, asking, “*Where is He?*” that they may come to him, confess their sin to him, and obtain mercy from him. — “*When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek*” (Psalms 27:8). — “*With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*” (Isaiah 26:9).

All who trust Christ seek him with all their hearts. Believers are men and women who live in the pursuit of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:9; Philippians 3:7-14). Those who love the Lord earnestly seek him (Song of Solomon 3:3). When our Beloved has withdrawn himself from us and hides his face from us because of our sinful neglect of him or disobedience to him, once we are made to bitterly lament our sin and his absence, we crave his return. Our hearts pine for communion with him. And we ache for his manifest presence with us.

Return, beloved Lord, return!
My straying heart arrest!
If You will make Your presence known,
Then shall my soul be blessed.

And we know, we are graciously made to know, that we pine for our Beloved only because he graciously causes us to pine for him (Song of Solomon 5:2-8).

The soul that thirsts for Christ's, longing to behold his glory, anxiously looking for his second coming, cries "*Where is He?*" When we hear our Savior say, "*Surely I come quickly. Amen,*" our hearts respond, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Revelation 22:20).

"When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, yes glory, for me!"

Answered by Scripture

Second, this question, — "*Where is He?*" — is answered plainly in the Book of God. This is not something about which God leaves us to guess. Where is Christ to be found? If we turn to the pages of Holy Scripture to discover the answer to this question, we will find that it is answered very clearly. Do you ask, "*Where is He?*" Search the Scriptures, and you will discover that....

He is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). Christ is the center of heaven. Here is the glory of Glory (Revelation 4 and 5). He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. — "*Where is He?*" He is seated upon the throne of universal dominion. There he sits in the serenity of total sovereignty. There he reigns and must reign, until he has made all his foes His footstool. Jesus Christ is Lord of all forever (John 17:2; Romans 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). He is at the right hand of the majesty on high, in the place of representation and advocacy as our great High Priest (Romans 8:27, 34; 1 John 2:1-2). The Lord Jesus Christ is on the throne of grace, dispensing mercy to helpless, guilty, needy sinners. The Son of God is within the reach of needy sinners like you and me. He is a God accessible to all who seek him (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Answered by Experience

Third, this is a question that must be answered by experience. — "*Where is He?*"

Let me tell you what I know by the sweet experience of his grace. Are you yet without Christ? I pray that God has aroused an interest in your soul. I hope you are interested in the answer to this question, "*Where is He?*" If you are interested in the answer, I want to give the testimony of a needy soul who has "*found him whom my soul loveth.*" I have found him at the mercy-seat when, in the closet of my heart, I have cried to him in secret prayer (Isaiah 65:24). I have found him in his Word, when I have opened the Book of God seeking him (John 5:39; Luke 24:44-47). I have found him in the assemblies of his people, where he promised to meet his own (Matthew 18:20). I have found him at his table in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

I find him in the field of service, as I have sought to do his bidding (Matthew 28:18-20). As we serve the interests of his kingdom, his people, his Gospel, and his glory, as we seek to do his will and honor his name, as we endeavor to serve the souls of men, as we try to serve our generation by the will of God, our Savior says, “*I am with you always!*” — And He is! He is with us in sympathy. He is with us to guide us. He is with us to strengthen us. He is with us to protect us. And he is with us to make our way prosperous and successful, according to the will of God.

I have found Him in every fiery furnace of trial, in every lion’s den of persecution, in every storm of difficulty, and in every river of woe to which I have been exposed. I have been a lot of places. I have experienced a lot of things. I have known a few troubles along the way. But I have never been in any place of need without him who is my Rock and my Salvation (Isaiah 43:1-5). I have always found the Lord Jesus Christ to be a God at hand (Philippians 4:4-7). Christ is always near us. Christ is always with us. Christ is always in us (Colossians 1:27).

A Personal Question

Fourth, I want you to make this a very personal question. “*Where is He*” in relation to me? Is He in you? If Christ is in you, then you are in him and in him you are worthy before God (Colossians 1:12), “*counted worthy of the Kingdom of God*” (2 Thessalonians 1:5). This is the issue to be settled. — Is Jesus Christ in you? Is Christ alone at the foundation of your hope, at the ground of your faith? Is he at the root of your joys? Is Jesus Christ King upon the throne of your heart? Is his presence in you manifest in your spirit, attitude, words, and actions? Is Christ before you as the goal of your life, the hope of your soul, the end of your journey, the prize of heaven toward whom you are pressing?

“*Where is He?*” — Our Master is always at home; but he does not always meet his family in the same room. Sometimes we meet him in the closet of prayer. At other times he meets us in the great assembly hall of his palace, the house of public worship. We meet him on his porch, beholding his wonders in morning and evening meditations. Reading the Bible, I meet him in his library. As I labor in his vineyard, I commune with him in his garden. When my heart is lively and filled with hopeful expectation, he walks with me on the housetop. When my spirits sink, he meets me in the cellar, takes me by the hand, and leads me up the stairs. Every room in his house is good. Wherever he meets me, I rejoice. But the best room in the house is that in which he spreads his Table before me and makes himself to be Bread and Wine to my soul, “*a feast of fat things*” (Isaiah 25:6) to my soul! Let it be the ever increasing desire of our hearts, while we live in this world, to find him and live upon him and walk with him!

Temple Doctrine

“Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself. 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. Did not Moses give you the law, and *yet* none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. 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? 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? Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is. 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. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. 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? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Then said Jesus unto them, 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. Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What *manner of* saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me*: and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come?” (John 7:14-36)

In the midst of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Lord Jesus went up into the Temple at Jerusalem and taught. Here, in John 7:14-36, we read the doctrine he taught. Would to God that in every place where men and women claim to worship God today such doctrine were taught. Robert Hawker observed...

“It is very blessed to behold Christ going up to keep this ordinance, in fulfilling the whole law. And we have abundant reason to bless him that he did, for the Church would have lost this divine Sermon, which this chapter records, had he not gone there. Yea, indeed, as this was the last public preaching of Jesus, at the feast of tabernacles, it merits the attention of his people the more, as being decisive to the great points of his doctrine.”

May God the Holy Spirit graciously teach us our Savior’s doctrine. Here are seven decisive points of doctrine to be observed in this passage.

1. **If you go to hell, it will be entirely your own fault** (vv. 16-17).

Man’s will and works have nothing to do with salvation. That is all God’s work alone. But if you perish, it will be altogether because of your will and your work. — “*The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” That is precisely the doctrine our Lord Jesus declared in John 7:16-17.

Faith in Christ is the gift of God; but unbelief is a choice of man, a decision of the will, a deliberate act of obstinate rebellion to God. The Son of God here tells us plainly that if you will do God's will, you will know his doctrine. But, our Savior says, "*Ye will not believe*" (Luke 22:67). — "*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*" (John 5:40).

2. Any preacher who exalts and promotes himself is not God's servant (v. 18).

"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." — Multitudes fill the pulpits of churches in every place like Diotrophes, who, craving the honor of men and loving to have pre-eminence, exalt themselves. Such men are crafty, self-serving users of men. Our Lord Jesus was not such a preacher; and those who serve Him are not such (2 Corinthians 4:5).

That man who is called of God is deeply sensible of his Savior's majesty and his own infirmity. He sees in himself nothing but sin, unworthiness, and insufficiency. He knows that he is less than nothing (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 15:9). But that man who knows that he is not motivated by Christ, that he is not led by the Spirit of God, that he has no regard for the glory of God, tries to cover his defects by exalting his name. Like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, he seeks the praise of men.

God's servants do not exalt themselves. They exalt the Triune God, uplifting the crucified Christ, crying, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*"

3. Any religion that destroys mercy and compassion is false religion (vv. 19-23).

The Scribes and Pharisees, the religious rulers at the Feast in Jerusalem, were still stewing over the fact that our Lord Jesus had healed the impotent man (John 5:1-8) on the sabbath day. Those same men were very strict about circumcising a child on the eighth day, even if the procedure had to be done on the sabbath. They did not mind cutting an infant on the Sabbath; but they despised the Lord Jesus because, as he puts it, — "*I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day*" (v. 23). — "*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).

God's servants are more interested in caring for the souls of men than in defending a creed. They are more concerned about helping sinners than disciplining them. They prefer compassion to confessions, and are more interested in knowing, trusting, serving, and worshipping the Lord Jesus than they are in the opinions of men about them and their work.

4. Our judgment concerning other people and their actions should never be rash and hasty, but cautious and righteous (v. 24).

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." — We must not judge by appearance. The wise man says, "*It is not good to have respect of person in judgment*" (Proverbs 24:23). — "*Judge righteously between every man and his brother...Ye shall not have respect of persons in judgment*" (Deuteronomy 1:16-17). — "*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons*" (James 2:1).

We are all far too quick to censure others. To the eye of man, seeing a child circumcised on the sabbath day might appear evil; but it was not. God commanded it. Neither was it evil to heal a man on the sabbath. Mercy is never wrong! Let us judge things rightly. Always judge the actions of others with the greatest lenience possible. If we must be severe, we should be severe in judging ourselves and our own actions. — "*First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye*" (Matthew 7:5).

5. Unbelief is a willful, deliberate denial of that which men know; yet no man can believe on the Son of God except he be taught of God (vv. 25-29).

These men knew what they were doing. They had heard the Savior's words. They saw his miracles. They knew that he was, after the flesh, of the royal seed of David. Yet, they willfully shut their eyes to the things they knew, because they had no spiritual knowledge. Their heads were full of facts; but they did not know God. "*Willingly ignorant*" (2 Peter 3:5) men and women shut their eyes against the plainest facts and most undeniable doctrines, because they will not bow to and trust the crucified Christ as their Lord and Savior. Men will not believe what they do not want to believe (John 6:44-47). So they "*hold*" (hold down, suppress) "*the truth in unrighteousness.*"

6. Our great God and heavenly Father rules and overrules all things, even the will of man, to accomplish His own will (v. 30).

So magnificently wise and great is our God that he even rules the very thoughts of His enemies, ever using them only as he will, for the accomplishment of his great saving purposes of grace in the redemption of our souls. — "*Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.*"

All our Lord's sufferings were voluntary, of his own will. He did not go to the cross because he could not help it. He did not die because he could not prevent his death. Neither Jew nor Gentile, Pharisee nor Sadducee, Annas nor Caiaphas, Herod nor Pontius Pilate could have injured him, except power had been given them from above. All that they did was done under the control and by the decree of God (Acts 2:23). The crucifixion was purposed in the eternal counsels of the Trinity. The sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus could not begin until the very hour which God had appointed before the world was made. This is a great mystery. But it is a blessed revelation of divine truth.

It is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to God's saints. Let us never forget that we live in a world ruled by our God. Our heavenly Father overrules all times and events; and nothing can happen but by God's will, purpose, and decree. The very hairs of our heads are all numbered. Neither sorrow nor sickness, nor poverty, nor persecution can touch his elect, unless God has ordained it as an instrument to help his chosen. Our times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). All is well!

"Mortals are immortal here,
Until their work is done!"

7. When God shuts the door, it cannot be opened (vv. 31-34).

To some the preaching of the Gospel is "*the savor of life unto life,*" to others "*of death unto death.*" If God opens the door, none can shut it; and if God shuts the door, none can open it. Oh, may he be pleased to open to you the Door Christ Jesus and sweetly force you in. God help you now, oh, may he sweetly force you by irresistible grace to come to Christ and be saved.

"Ye sinners seek His face, whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross, and find salvation there!"

Chapter 56

Are you thirsty?

“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. (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 7:37-39)

By the time our Lord Jesus came into this world the Jews’ religion had degenerated into nothing but an outward form, bearing very little resemblance to the worship God established by the hand of Moses when he gave his servant the Pattern of the tabernacle. They retained much of the outward form, the holy days and the great holy convocations required by the law. But they knew nothing of spiritual worship, and really cared nothing for the meaning of the ordinances they practiced. They retained what they wanted, observed what they enjoyed, and practiced that by which they could gain something. Everything else in the Book of God they ignored. — Much like most religious people today.

In addition to that mockery of God, the Jews had more religious traditions and customs of human invention than a dog has fleas. Let me tell you about one of them.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, on the 8th day of the feast, which was the last day of the feast, that which they considered “*the great day of the feast*,” they read the last section of the law. Then, as the climatic act of their feast, they observed a very solemn ceremony, a ceremony altogether of their own invention. I presume they thought it made the worship of God more appealing.

In a very solemn procession they would parade down to the river Shiloh with buckets and bring buckets of water up to the temple. The priests would take their buckets of water and pour them out on the altar. As they did, the people would sing, “*With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation*” (Isaiah 12:3).

That is exactly where we are in John 7:37-39. The Jews had been up to the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem. They had been there for eight days. They had gone through all the rites and ceremonies of their now empty religion. They had done all that they knew to do. They had done all that their religious leaders told them to do. But their religion had left them thirsty. Now, they were going home, going home just as empty and thirsty as they were when they came up to the feast. As they were leaving the temple, the Lord Jesus stepped up on a high place where he could be seen and heard by all, and cried with a loud voice, “*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.*”

Are you thirsty? Has your religion left you thirsty? Come to Christ. Drink of the life-giving Fountain; and thirst no more.

The Thirst

The Lord Jesus says, “*If any man thirst.*” — The thirst he speaks of is a spiritual thirst, a thirst in your soul, a thirst in the heart. It is an anxiety of soul arising from conviction of sin, a desire of pardon arising from a sense of guilt, a longing after peace of conscience arising from a dread of judgment. Do you feel your guilt, your sins, your iniquity? Do you want forgiveness? Are you sensible of your soul’s need? Do you want help and relief? If so, this is the Savior’s word to you.

“If any man thirst.” — The Jews who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, and were *“pricked in their hearts,”* the Philippian jailer who cried to Paul and Silas, *“What must I do to be saved?”* were thirsty. Are You thirsty? Few people are.

Many there are who thirst after every vain thing; but few thirst for Christ. Few thirst for mercy. Few thirst for God’s salvation. Are you thirsty? Blessed are those who know something by experience of this spiritual *“thirst.”* The beginning of all true Christianity is to discover that we are guilty, empty, needy sinners. Until we know that we are lost, we cannot be saved. The very first step toward heaven is to be thoroughly convinced that we deserve hell. That sense of sin, which sometimes alarms a man and makes him think his own case is hopelessly desperate, is a good sign. It is in fact an indication of God given life wrought in the soul (Matthew 5:1-6).

How broad, how inclusive these words are! — *“If any man thirst!”* The Gospel of Christ is for *“any man.”* It matters not who you are, what you have been, or what you have done. The Lord Jesus says, *“If any man thirst let him come!”* If you are thirsty, the invitation is for you. No other qualification is required. Are you thirsty? Our Lord Jesus does not say a word here about repentance that must be experienced, amendments that must be made, preparations for grace that must be experienced, knowledge that must be gained, or works that must be done.

Are you thirsty? Do you feel the weight of your sins pressing you down to hell? Do you thirst for peace, pardon, forgiveness, righteousness, acceptance with God? If so, this is a Word from God for you.

Come and Drink

“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.” — Here is the Fountain of Life, the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, the smitten Rock that gushes forth rivers of living waters, the Well of Salvation, stretching forth his hands to poor, needy sinners, calling thirsty souls to come to him and drink. Christ is the Supplier of all spiritual necessities. Christ is the Reliever of all spiritual needs. He calls all who feel the heavy burden of sin to come to him and find relief.

Those words, *“let him come unto me,”* are very simple and easily understood. But they settle a mighty question, which all the wisdom of Greek and Roman philosophers could never settle. They tell us how man can have peace with God. They tell us that peace is to be had in Christ by trusting in him as our Mediator and Substitute.

To *“come”* to Christ is to believe on him; and to *“believe”* on him is to come. There is no other way to obtain peace. Salvation is to be had by casting your soul upon Christ, committing yourself to Christ, coming to Christ. Believing on the Son of God, coming to the Lord Jesus, we receive the adoption of children and free and full justification as the sons of God (John 1:12-13; 6:35, 37; Romans 4:25-5:11).

The saints of God in every age have been and are men and women who drink of this fountain by faith and find relief. They have experienced this thirst of soul and the relief of Christ quenching their souls’ thirst. They felt their guilt and emptiness and thirsted for deliverance. They heard of a full supply of pardon, mercy, and grace in Christ crucified for all who trust him. They believe the good news. They cast aside all confidence in their own goodness and worthiness and come to Christ by faith. So coming they have found relief. So coming daily they live. So coming they hope to die.

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” — *“Drink!”* — What a great word that is! The Son of God says to thirsty sinners, *“Come unto me and drink!”* He says, *“Come to me and freely take from me everything your soul needs: — mercy, grace, pardon, peace, strength, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification,*

redemption!” Christ is the Fountain of Life. Drink from the Fountain! Bathe in the Fountain! Swim in the Fountain!

The Promise of Life

In verse 37 the Lord Jesus promises life to all who come and drink. But there is more here than the promise of life. The Lord Jesus promises that every thirsty sinner who comes to him shall have life in a river of life in himself. — *“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”*

All who come to Christ by faith shall find in him abundant satisfaction for themselves. And the believing sinner becomes a fountain of life to others. Being blessed of God, the believing sinner is made an instrumental source of blessing to others. What a Fountain of Life Christ is in our souls! *“Christ in you,”* the Spirit of God declares, is *“the Hope of Glory!”*

Once far from God and dead in sin,
No light my heart could see;
But in God’s Word the light now shines,
And Christ liveth in me!

As rays of light from yonder sun,
The flowers of earth set free,
So life and light and love came forth
From Christ living in me.

Christ liveth in me,
Christ liveth in me,
Oh! what a salvation this,
That Christ liveth in me.

What peace and hope, what comfort and joy, what riches of grace and mercy and love we find in our dear Savior! In him we find grace according to our need, and strength according to our days. In myself I find nothing but disappointed; but I have never been disappointed in Christ.

I cannot tell you what a blessing my God has made other saved sinners to be to me. I constantly find the sweet waters of life flowing to my soul from God’s saints. Their love engaged for my help, their quickness to forgive my offences, their readiness to supply the needs of others, their eagerness to see sinners come to know the Savior, and their zeal for the gospel, for the glory of God and for the kingdom of God are all as rivers of living waters to my soul, ever refreshing, reviving, and invigorating.

Only in the Day of Judgment, when all things are revealed, will we know the good that God has done by each believer, once the rivers of living water start flowing out of his belly. Some do good while they live, by their tongues, like the Apostles and first preachers of the gospel. Others do good when they are dying, like Stephen and the penitent thief. And others do good after they have been dead many years, like Bunyan, Gill, Spurgeon, Hawker, etc.

When I read, *“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,”* I thought, “I don’t recall a passage that says that.” So I took down a concordance and started looking for the place in which the Scriptures say that, and discovered that my memory had not failed me. The Scriptures do not say that anywhere; but the Scriptures do declare it everywhere (Isaiah 12:3; 35:6-7; 41:18; 44:18; 55:1; Zechariah 14:8, 16).

A Difficulty Cleared

I am reluctant to mention it, but there is a difficulty in our text that needs to be cleared. Look at verse 39.

(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.)

Obviously, the Holy Spirit existed before the Lord Jesus was glorified. He is the eternal God, the third Person in the triune Godhead (1 John 5:7).

Equally obvious is the fact that in the Old Testament, God the Holy Spirit regenerated, called, sanctified, guided, and preserved chosen, redeemed sinners, just as he does today. Without the Spirit of God there is no spiritual life. Without him there is no faith in Christ. Without him there is no union with Christ. Yet, God's saints of old enjoyed those sweet blessings of grace just as we do. — Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. — Enoch walked in sweet communion with God and spoke by the Spirit of prophecy. — Abraham believed God. — David cried, "*Take not thy Holy Spirit from me!*"

What, then, is the meaning of John's words in verse 39? In what sense was the Holy Spirit not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified? He was not yet given to the Gentiles as the manifest, inaugural gift of the enthroned Messiah. It was, as our Savior said in John 16, expedient for us that he return to the Father, that the blessing of Abraham, the promise of the Spirit might gush forth from heaven upon chosen sinners of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue in all his life-giving power. The gift of the Spirit is God's declaration of redemption accomplished, Christ enthroned, salvation finished, the Surety accepted, and the covenant fulfilled (Psalms 68:18-19).

Are you thirsty? Come to Christ and drink away the thirst of your soul!

“Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and power:
He is able, He is able,
He is willing: doubt no more.

Ho! Ye thirsty, come and welcome;
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money, Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth
Is to feel your need of Him:
This he gives you; This he gives you;
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Come, ye weary heavy laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;

If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all;
Not the righteous, Not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call.

View Him grov'ling in the garden,
Lo! Your Maker prostrate lies;
On the bloody tree behold Him!
Hear Him cry before He dies,
'It is finished!' *'It is finished!'*
Sinner, will not this suffice?

Lo! Th' incarnate God ascended,
Pleads the merit of His blood;
Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude:
None but Jesus, None but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good.

Saints and angels, joined in concert,
Sing the praises of the Lamb;
While the blissful seats of heaven
Sweetly echo with His name.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Sinners here may sing the same."

(Joseph Hart)

Christ the Cause of Division

“Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. 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? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. 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? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house.” (John 7:40-53)

What horrible divisions there are among men! Since the days of Noah, men have been dividing into groups. It seems that man, by nature, prefers strife to unity, conflict to communion, and war to peace. Men and women everywhere look for excuses to quarrel. How easily even families, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, children and parents are divided from one another! How sad! How very, very sad!

Even among those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, divisions often come. Paul and Barnabas were both true servants of God, brothers in Christ and co-laborers in the gospel. Both were loved of God, redeemed by Christ, and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Both were used greatly by God for the furtherance of the gospel and the glory of Christ. Yet, Paul and Barnabas fell into strife and were divided from one another!

What is the cause of strife and division among men? What causes strife in your home? What is the cause of strife among brethren? This is what the Book of God says: — “*Only by pride cometh contention*” (Proverbs 13:10). Pride of race, pride of place, and pride of face are the things that raise contention. Nosey busybodies cause divisions. Idle gossips, with their slandering tongues, cause strife. Hear what God says about this matter.

“*A wrathful man stirreth up strife*” (Proverbs 15:18). — “*He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends*” (Proverbs 17:9). — “*A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends*” (Proverbs 16:28). — “*He loveth transgression that loveth strife*” (Proverbs 17:19). — “*Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife*” (Proverbs 26:20-21). — “*He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife*” (Proverbs 28:25). — “*An angry man stirreth up strife*” (Proverbs 29:22). — “*The forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife*” (Proverbs 30:33).

May God teach me kindness and give me grace to use my influence and energy to promote others and promote peace. Spirit of God, keep me from grieving you by that corrupt communication, bitterness, anger, wrath, and evil speaking that injures others and causes strife. — “*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*” (Matthew 5:9). I want to be a peacemaker. Don’t you?

But, having said all that, I hasten to say that not all strife is evil and not all peace is good. Division is not always evil; and unity is not always good. A united mob of rebels is still a mob of rebels. A peaceful cemetery is still a cemetery.

Here in John 7 we will read about a strife that cannot be avoided, if we are faithful to our God and faithful witnesses of Christ. Christ himself is often the cause of great division among men. Why was John inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record these things? Why does he tell us about this division of men that arose

because of the Lord Jesus? What are we to learn from this passage? Four things are obvious. May God the Holy Spirit teach us these four things.

Useless Knowledge

First, there is a vast difference between religious knowledge and spiritual knowledge. Religious knowledge without faith in Christ is useless, damning knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is the gift of God, the gift and accompaniment of saving grace. Religious knowledge is but the acquirement of the flesh.

We are told that some of our Lord's hearers knew clearly where Christ was to be born. They were obviously very familiar with many facts recorded in Scripture. They knew the prophets. They knew that the Messiah would be of David's seed. They knew that he would be born in Bethlehem. They knew that the time for his coming was then at hand.

Yet, the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened. They groped about in utter darkness. The Christ, the Messiah was standing before them; and they could not see him! He was standing in their midst; and they were debating about places, family trees, and dates. Christ was in their midst; but they did not know him, believe him, receive him, trust him, or obey him.

Without question, where there is no knowledge there is no faith. — "*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*" Faith is not a leap in the dark. An "*unknown God*" can never be the object of true worship, worship in spirit and in truth. You cannot know, trust, love, and worship an unknown God. But spiritual, saving knowledge is not something that can be acquired by human effort.

Many in our day, like these men in John 7, know the words of Scripture well who have not a clue what those words teach. Many know the facts of Scripture history who have no idea what those facts recorded mean, what they are intended to teach. Many know the doctrine of Christ who do not know Christ.

Salvation is knowing Christ (John 17:3). Salvation is not knowing about Christ, but knowing Christ. It is not knowing what he taught, but knowing him! Eternal life is not knowing what Christ did, but knowing Christ (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

The very devils know the Scriptures better than you or me; but they are devils still. They are unaffected by what they know. And many men and women are just like them. They are familiar with the letter of Scripture, and are able to quote scores of texts. They reason, argue, and debate about theological theory; and they are dead in trespasses and sins.

Saving knowledge is heart-knowledge. Sunday School teachers cannot convey it. Preachers cannot bestow it. Parents cannot give it. Heart-knowledge comes when Christ is revealed in you (Galatians 1:15). Heart-knowledge is bestowed when Christ is formed in you in the new birth. When Christ is in you, you have the mind of Christ. Until then, you have no spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

Saving, spiritual knowledge, that knowledge that comes by the new creation of grace, causes the heaven born soul to know the plague of his own heart, the guilt of sin, the righteousness of God in Christ, and the accomplishment of redemption by Christ (John 16:7-11).

This is the highest degree of knowledge to which any mortal can attain. If you have it, it is God's gift; and you have eternal life. If you lack this saving knowledge that causes poor, needy sinners to cast all hope upon Christ, all your learning and wisdom, all your knowledge and skill in religious things is but darkness and delusion.

Preaching with Authority

Second, our Master is held before us in this passage as the example to be followed by all preachers. He shows us what it is to preach with authority. We are told that even the officers of the chief priests who were sent to arrest him were struck with awe and were amazed by his preaching. They said, — “*Never man spoke like this man*” (v. 46). That is exactly what we are told people said about our Savior when he finished preaching the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:28-29).

Our Lord’s authority in preaching was not in the loudness of his voice, or the oratorical skills he displayed. He obviously displayed none. It was not the authority of learning, or the authority of bombastic theatrics. Our Master’s authority in preaching was the confidence with which he spoke the things of God. — He believed; therefore, he spoke. His authority was displayed in the simplicity with which he spoke the truth of God. Authoritative preaching needs nothing to cover it, no hedges to hide behind, no hidden meaning to which one can retreat. Our Master’s authority in preaching was the fact that he preached to the hearts of men.

God give me grace to be such a preacher (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). May God raise up many to preach with such heavenly authority in this generation.

A Gradual Work

Third, we see in the example of Nicodemus that the work of God’s Spirit in converting a sinner is often a gradual work. We are told that Nicodemus stood up in the council of our Lord’s enemies and mildly pleaded that he deserved fair dealing. — “*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*” (v. 51)

Nicodemus is the man who eighteen months earlier came to our Lord by night. Yet, here he is, still content to be numbered among the Sanhedrin. Still, he appears to have been, even now, a disciple, a secret disciple forced to identify himself with his Savior. Obviously, I cannot speak with certainty about him; but that appears to be the case. Though he does not speak boldly, he does speak up in the Master’s defense. Soon, this same man would openly identify himself with the despised Nazarene, and would do so at a time when very few would. He was soon to come with Joseph of Arimathaea to seek permission from Pilate to prepare our Lord’s dead body for burial. He did so, remember, when all the Lord’s chosen apostles had forsaken him and fled (John 19:238-39).

The work of the Spirit does not always proceed with the same speed in the hearts and lives of chosen sinners. In some cases God’s work of grace may appear to be very slow, though real and true. We are often too quick to condemn some as graceless, because their experience does not exactly tally with our own. We should never set ourselves up as judges who can tell who is saved and who is lost. We should always be content to leave every man and every woman to stand or fall before his Master. They do not stand or fall before you and me. Because we judge everything by outward appearance, we always judge wrong. Some I once thought to be strong examples of faith and faithfulness proved to be reprobate in the end. Others I thought had proved themselves reprobate have proved themselves faithful. You cannot tell wheat from tares until harvest time. At harvest time the tares stand straight and tall. The wheat bows its head.

Division because of Christ

Fourth, we are plainly told that our Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of division among men. — “*So there was a division among the people because of him*” (v. 43). He who is the Prince of Peace is the greatest divider of men the world has ever known.

There was a division among the unbelieving people here because of him. Some said he was a prophet. Others said he was a deceiver. Still others acknowledged his claims, but still did not trust him. A few became his disciples, trusting him and following him.

There was a division of believers from unbelievers because of the Lord Jesus. There always is. This is a great and wide division. The more clearly it is seen the better. It is a division that must be maintained. Those who believed and those who believed not could not walk together. Eventually, Nicodemus was forced to separate himself from his lifelong friends, because he belonged to Christ. The same will be true of you and of me, if we belong to the Son of God.

In Revelation 18:4 we have a command from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the command our Lord gives to his people in every age. — *“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”*

Babylon is God’s name for all false religion. It is any religion and all religions which declare that salvation is ultimately dependent upon, decided by, or determined by man. Babylon is the religion of man. Babylon is the religion of the world. From Babylon, we must come out, *“and deliver every man his soul”* (Jeremiah 51:6). We are given the same command, only in broader terms, in 2 Corinthian 6:14-18.

It is the responsibility of God’s people in every age to thoroughly and distinctly separate themselves from false, apostate religion. As God commanded Lot to come out of Sodom, so he commands us to come out of Babylon. But, like Bro. Lot, we are all reluctant to do so. Our flesh is opposed to distinct separation. The religion of Babylon is so appealing and gratifying to our flesh that we will not leave it unless God lays hold of our hearts by the hand of his omnipotent grace and brings us out, even as the angel laid hold of Lot and brought him out of his beloved and cherished Sodom. May the Lord God be pleased to lay hold of our hearts and bring us altogether out of Babylon.

The Greek word translated *“division”* in John 7:43 is schism. It is used to identify a violent split, a split involving fierce contention. This cleavage caused by Christ divides the dearest friends and relatives. It is the deepest, the most painful, the most real, and the most permanent separation of men in the world. Yet, when faith comes and the separation is made, unity is produced that can never be dissolved or broken. Union with Christ gives us union with one another. In Christ all who are born of God are one: one body, one family, one kingdom, one church (Ephesians 2:11-22). In Christ Jesus nationalities are blended. Calvary heals Babel. Personal peculiarities cease to divide. Position, rank, and wealth bow before the uniting influence of grace. All God’s elect in all the changing ages of time are one in Christ Jesus. All the saints in heaven and on earth are one in him (Colossians 3:1-3, 10-15).

“None but the Woman”

“Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:1-12)

When the feast of Tabernacles was over, we are told that “*every man went unto his own house*” (John 7:53); but, though “*the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; the Son of man had not where to lay his head*” (Matthew 8:20). So we read in John 8:1 that “*Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.*” How our Savior loved to go to the Mount of Olives and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane! He went there often to spend the night alone with his Father and our Father, his God and our God (Luke 22:39). This was a place to which he went so regularly that when Judas betrayed him and led a band of soldiers to arrest him, the betrayer knew exactly where the Master would be (John 18:1-2).

You will remember that David, the great type of Christ, ascended the Mount of Olives barefooted and sorrowful (2 Samuel 15:23). Here here, in the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus knew he must soon encounter the prince of darkness. Knowing that here, in Gethsemane, he would soon sweat blood in anticipation of being made sin for us, knowing that here he would soon be betrayed, arrested and carried away to the cursed tree to be crucified for us, our blessed Savior made the Mount of Olives and its garden, Gethsemane, his favorite spot of ground. Truly, this place was to him, sacred ground, hallowed by his own precious blood! — How sacred Gethsemane’s memory ought to be to us!

“*Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them*” (vv. 1-2). — He prayed in Gethsemane by night and preached in the temple by day. His time seemed to be divided only by these two things: prayer and preaching. So it should be with all who preach the gospel (Acts 6:2). If we would serve the souls of men, if we would serve the cause of God’s glory in this generation, if we would be useful, let every gospel preacher devote himself to prayer and preaching. May God the Holy Spirit raise up pastors for his people who are addicted to prayer, study and preaching! What might we expect, if he were to do such a thing?

While our Lord Jesus was at the Feast of Tabernacles he infuriated the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees who were the exalted, highly praised leaders of Israel. Throughout the week, all during the feast, they tried to find some reason to kill him, or at least to discredit him. At last, they hatched a scheme that they thought would surely work. They laid a trap for an unsuspecting woman. One of them seduced her into the act of adultery. While he lay in his tent with this woman, his friends were posted outside the tent door watching to catch her in the very act of adultery.

On the day after the feast, our Lord came to the temple early in the morning. As he sat down and began to preach, the people gathered around to hear his words. While he was preaching, the Scribes and Pharisees broke in and sat this woman in the middle of the crowd and said, "*Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?*" Those poor, ignorant men thought they had surprised the Savior. They thought, "We've got you now!" I can see the smug grin on their faces. Can't you? They had no idea that the Lord Jesus had been praying for this woman all night. I can almost see the beaming smile of his heart, as the Pharisees bring the object of the Savior's love to him. They brought her to him, they thought, to have her killed. They had no idea that the Lord Jesus had used them to bring her to him to have her saved by his grace!

Those proud fools thought they had laid a trap from which the Lord Jesus could not escape. They reasoned within themselves that there is no way possible for this woman to be forgiven, without the law being broken. If Christ forgave the woman, they would accuse him of dishonoring the law. If he commanded the woman to be stoned, they would accuse him of falsely pretending to be merciful and compassionate. They thought that the Lord Jesus would have to relinquish justice, or that he would have to refuse mercy.

With devilish insight, these self-righteous men had hit upon the problem of all problems in respect to the relationship of a sinful man to a holy God. The problem is this: — How can God show love, mercy, and grace to a sinner and still be just, holy and true? — How can God be both just and the Justifier of the ungodly? — How can a man be just with God? From a human point of view, and in the minds of self-righteous religionists, the problem was unsolvable. But that which with men is impossible, is possible with God.

In this passage of Scripture we have a vivid picture of our Lord's compassion, mercy and grace upon sinners. He said, "*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*" and that is what he did. The self-righteous Pharisees went away confounded; and the poor guilty sinner was accepted, pardoned and justified. Here are five very important lessons for us to learn from this story of the woman taken in adultery.

Self-righteousness

First, we see, in the actions and attitude of these Scribes and Pharisees, the terrible evil of self-righteousness. The real evil revealed in this passage is not adultery, but self-righteousness. The real culprits were these proud, religious hypocrites, the Pharisees, not this woman. These Pharisees were very proud of their pretended righteousness and morality, though in reality they were the vilest of men. They were not without guilt in this matter.

Without question, self-righteousness is the most terrible of all sins. It is more offensive and abominable in the sight of God than any other crime. Murder is a terrible crime; but I would rather be charged with murder before the law of God than with self-righteousness. Stealing is a dreadful offense; but I would rather be charged with stealing before the bar of divine justice than with self-righteousness. Adultery is a loathsome evil; but I would rather stand before God as an adulterer than as a self-righteous man. Lying is a fearful breach of God's holy law; but I would rather appear before God guilty of lying than to appear before him guilty of self-righteousness.

This is no new sin. Ever since man became sinful, he has professed to be righteous. Self-righteousness is the most difficult sin we have to deal with. Anger, wrath, envy, hatred, and lusts may be overcome, because they are easily identified. But pride and self-righteousness are most well covered. Those who have the most of these are the least aware of them.

Self-righteousness flourishes and grows best among devoutly religious people. There it is watered by prayer, cultivated by religious profession, and fertilized by religious ceremony (Matthew 6:1-4, 5-8, 16-18). I fear that most of our public praying, most of our religious works, most of what we think is assurance of

salvation and evidence of grace, most of what we imagine is righteousness is nothing but self-righteous. All of our hurt feelings are manifestations of self-righteous (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18).

The wrath of God burns most intensely against self-righteousness; and the hottest place in hell is reserved for the self-righteous (Luke 20:46-47). Self-righteousness hates the grace of God. Self-righteousness is at the root of all gossip, slander, and persecution. Love covers sin. Self-righteousness exposes it. These Pharisees were not interested in honoring the law of God. They were interested in their own honor. They had no regard for this woman. They hated Christ, because he exposed the evil of their hearts. They hated the doctrine of Christ — salvation by grace alone. They were using this woman for their own purposes. They no regard for her at all. They could not have cared less whether she lived or died. They had no regard for Moses and the law either. They were just using the law and Moses' name for their own designs. That is always true of Pharisees. — They are religious zealots who care for nothing but themselves!

Self-righteousness is the most deadly of all sins. It most effectually bars a man from any hope of salvation. It makes God a liar (1 John 1:10). It blasphemes God. It rejects the righteousness of God in Christ. Self-righteousness is the most loathsome form of idolatry. It is the worship of self.

That is the first obvious thing to be learned from this story. Self-righteousness is a terrible evil. — *“Beware of the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees!”* It is self-righteousness (Luke 16:15).

Strict Justice

The *second* thing we see in this passage is the utter severity of God's holy law. The law of God is unbending, unrelenting, uncompromising in its strict justice. There is no question that the law of God required that this woman be put to death (Deuteronomy 22:22-24; Leviticus 20:10). It is written in the law, *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20).

The law of God is perfectly clear and utterly severe. There are no exceptions, no excuses, no extenuating circumstances to be considered. There is no room for pardon. There are no grounds for amnesty. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die!”* The law does not take into consideration the sinner's age, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's ability or lack of ability, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's environment, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's intelligence or ignorance, only his guilt.

One breach of God's holy law, one transgression, one act of sin is ground enough for our punishment. Any lack of conformity to the holy law of God, in thought, in word, or in deed demands eternal damnation. Sin is an evil committed against the infinite God, demanding infinite satisfaction, or eternal punishment. We are guilty; and we must die. The law of God demands it. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* The law of God will not allow leniency. The law will not allow mercy. The law will not allow pardon. The law will not allow forgiveness. The law of God is utterly, inflexibly severe. Wherever sin is found, it must be punished. — *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Romans 3:19-20).

Salvation by the works of the law is a foolish absurdity. The law demands perfection or punishment. It offers no alternatives. Behold the utter severity of God's holy law, and be warned!

Divine Forgiveness

Third, this passage of Scripture teaches us much about divine forgiveness. It shows us that sin cannot be forgiven until God's broken law is silenced. — God must do something for himself before he can do anything for a sinner. Let me show you what I mean by that.

Before this woman could be forgiven the law of God had to be dealt with. Her accusers had to be silenced. And before any of us can be forgiven, the accusations of God's law must be silenced. The law of God must be satisfied. Our Lord Jesus Christ came not to condemn, but to save. Yet, he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. Now, how could that be done? How could he fulfil the law and yet save this poor, guilty, adulterous woman? How could he fulfil the law and yet save us?

First, our Lord Jesus silenced this woman's accusers (vv. 6-9). At first, he ignored these religious hypocrites. He knew who they were, what they had done, and why they had done it. But they continued to press the issue, thinking that he was now trapped in the dilemma they had created. Then he drove away the woman's accusers.

He cast the light of judgment upon these men. Obviously, he wrote something on the ground that astonished these men, something that shocked them. He may have written some names, and times, and places involving these very men. He may have written the name of the man who was with this woman in the act of adultery. He may have written out the events exactly as they really happened. He may even have written something like this: — "Suppose a perfectly innocent one volunteer to take this woman's place? Let her go, and take me instead. I will give myself to be her Substitute."

Whatever it was that he wrote, it seized these hypocrites with a legal conviction. They were pricked by their own guilty consciences. At last, they all left. There were no witnesses to accuse this woman, so the law had no claim upon her. The Lord Jesus silenced this poor woman's accusers and drove them away.

So, too, by his one, all-sufficient, sin-atoning sacrifice for us at Calvary, our Lord Jesus, our all-glorious Christ has forever silenced the claims of the law against us (Romans 8:1-4).

This is the only means by which the law of God can be satisfied and the mercy of God extended. Christ died as our Substitute, under the penalty of God's holy law for us. The substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary is the only basis of divine forgiveness; and justice satisfied demands that the sinner go free (Romans 8:31-34).

Our Lord Jesus Christ freely forgave this guilty woman. She was guilty, but not condemned! The law could not condemn her; and Christ would not condemn her, so she must be pardoned. She must go free. And that is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. We were guilty. Indeed, we are guilty. But we shall never be condemned. Our sin is gone. Christ took it away. The law is silenced. It cannot charge us with sin. Justice is satisfied. Christ satisfied it.

Christ Jesus my discharge procured,
The whole of wrath Divine endured:
The law's tremendous curse He bore;
Justice can never ask for more.

Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then demand the price from me,
For whom Christ died at Calvary.

Be still, my soul, and find sweet rest —

The merits of my great High Priest,
His righteousness and precious blood,
Have satisfied the Holy God.

I'll trust Christ's efficacious blood,
And never fear the wrath of God,
Since Jesus Christ has died for me,
And lives for me to intercede.

There is no condemnation for any believer in Christ. There is no basis for condemnation. There is no condemnation now. There is no condemnation for the future.

And this pardon and forgiveness is absolutely free and unconditional. If our Lord had said, "Go and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee," the poor woman would have been without hope. But he said, "*Neither do I condemn thee.*" My pardon and forgiveness is free. "*Go and sin nor more.*"

Who shall condemn to endless flames
The chosen people of our God,
Since in the Book of Life their names
Are written clear in Jesus' blood?

He, for the sins of His elect,
Has full, complete atonement made;
And justice never can expect
That the same debt should twice be paid!

As guilty sinners, worthy of eternal damnation, we worship and praise the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, for the free, full, everlasting pardon of sin through his blood. That precious blood is the only way God can or will forgive sin. And that shed blood is effectual, securing the forgiveness of every sinner for whom the Savior died, every sinner who believes on the Son of God unto life everlasting.

Sovereign Grace

Fourth, we are here taught something about the mysterious ways of God's sovereign grace. Those Scribes and Pharisees were doing exactly what they wanted to do, without any force or compulsion except their own wicked wills. Yet, the Lord God was sovereignly controlling all the circumstances and events of the day. He was secretly working through these wicked men to bring this poor, guilty woman to her Savior. Truly, as William Cowper wrote...

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will."

This poor, guilty, trembling woman was not seeking the Lord. But he was seeking her. He had chosen her. He loved her. He was about to redeem her. And now the appointed time of grace had come. She would be

his. He used ungodly men to expose her shame. The very men who wanted her dead and sought her destruction were used by God to carry the chosen object of his sovereign love into the arms of her Savior. He used her shame to humble her. He used even her loathsome sin to bring her to himself. He wisely, graciously, sovereignly, and tenderly made her willing to embrace the Savior in the day of his power. At the time of grace, he wrought a mighty change in this woman's heart. Once she saw Christ, she hated her sin, and she fell in love with him.

True Repentance

One final thing that we are taught in this story is the nature of true repentance. The Apostle Paul tells us that there is a repentance that must be repented of, a repentance that "*worketh death*" (2 Corinthians 7:10). True repentance is much more than a mere reformation of life. It is a change of heart and attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ. In the presence of Christ this woman was convinced of her sin. She offered no plea in her own defense. She stood before the Lord silently in her guilt. The Pharisees were convinced of their guilt by their consciences. This woman was convinced of her guilt by the Savior, by Christ Jesus making himself known to her. Theirs was a legal conviction of terror. Hers was a gospel conviction of brokenness and contrition before God.

This woman recognized Christ as her Lord. She did not ask for anything. She seems to have simply waited in submission before her sovereign Master, realizing that he had the right to damn her and the power to save her. She refused to leave Christ. She was overwhelmed by his grace and conquered by his love. Her only hope was in the Savior; and she knew it. She could not leave him. She had nowhere else to go. She submitted herself to the authority and dominion of Christ the Lord. From that day forth she took up her cross and followed him in the way.

We must place ourselves somewhere in this story. Are we like the crowd, who stood watching? They witnessed forgiveness, but did not enter into it. Are we like the Scribes and Pharisees? They were in the place where grace was bestowed, but they were too proud and self-righteous to seek it. Or, are we like this poor woman, crushed with guilt before God, broken with the heavy, heavy load of guilt and sin before the Son of God, guilty, dirty, exposed, naked? If we can take our place with this poor, dirty adulterous woman before the Lord Jesus, he will forgive us too!

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Self-righteousness

First, we see, in the actions and attitude of these Scribes and Pharisees, the terrible evil of self-righteousness. The real evil revealed in this passage is not adultery, but self-righteousness. The real culprits were these proud, religious hypocrites, the Pharisees, not this woman. These Pharisees were very proud of their pretended righteousness and morality, though in reality they were the vilest of men. They were not without guilt in this matter.

Without question, self-righteousness is the most terrible of all sins. It is more offensive and abominable in the sight of God than any other crime. Murder is a terrible crime; but I would rather be charged with murder before the law of God than with self-righteousness. Stealing is a dreadful offense; but I would rather be charged with stealing before the bar of divine justice than with self-righteousness. Adultery is a loathsome evil; but I would rather stand before God as an adulterer than as a self-righteous man. Lying is a fearful breach of God's holy law; but I would rather appear before God guilty of lying than to appear before him guilty of self-righteousness.

This is no new sin. Ever since man became sinful, he has professed to be righteous. Self-righteousness is the most difficult sin we have to deal with. Anger, wrath, envy, hatred, and lusts may be overcome, because they are easily identified. But pride and self-righteousness are most well covered. Those who have the most of these are the least aware of them.

Self-righteousness flourishes and grows best among devoutly religious people. There it is watered by prayer, cultivated by religious profession, and fertilized by religious ceremony (Matthew 6:1-4, 5-8, 16-18). I fear that most of our public praying, most of our religious works, most of what we think is assurance of

salvation and evidence of grace, most of what we imagine is righteousness is nothing but self-righteous. All of our hurt feelings are manifestations of self-righteous (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18).

The wrath of God burns most intensely against self-righteousness; and the hottest place in hell is reserved for the self-righteous (Luke 20:46-47). Self-righteousness hates the grace of God. Self-righteousness is at the root of all gossip, slander, and persecution. Love covers sin. Self-righteousness exposes it. These Pharisees were not interested in honoring the law of God. They were interested in their own honor. They had no regard for this woman. They hated Christ, because he exposed the evil of their hearts. They hated the doctrine of Christ — salvation by grace alone. They were using this woman for their own purposes. They had no regard for her at all. They could not have cared less whether she lived or died. They had no regard for Moses and the law either. They were just using the law and Moses' name for their own designs. That is always true of Pharisees. — They are religious zealots who care for nothing but themselves!

Self-righteousness is the most deadly of all sins. It most effectually bars a man from any hope of salvation. It makes God a liar (1 John 1:10). It blasphemes God. It rejects the righteousness of God in Christ. Self-righteousness is the most loathsome form of idolatry. It is the worship of self.

That is the first obvious thing to be learned from this story. Self-righteousness is a terrible evil. — *“Beware of the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees!”* It is self-righteousness (Luke 16:15).

Strict Justice

The *second* thing we see in this passage is the utter severity of God's holy law. The law of God is unbending, unrelenting, uncompromising in its strict justice. There is no question that the law of God required that this woman be put to death (Deuteronomy 22:22-24; Leviticus 20:10). It is written in the law, *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20).

The law of God is perfectly clear and utterly severe. There are no exceptions, no excuses, no extenuating circumstances to be considered. There is no room for pardon. There are no grounds for amnesty. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die!”* The law does not take into consideration the sinner's age, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's ability or lack of ability, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's environment, only his guilt. The law does not take into consideration the sinner's intelligence or ignorance, only his guilt.

One breach of God's holy law, one transgression, one act of sin is ground enough for our punishment. Any lack of conformity to the holy law of God in thought, in word, or in deed demands eternal damnation. Sin is an evil committed against the infinite God, demanding infinite satisfaction, or eternal punishment. We are guilty; and we must die. The law of God demands it. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* The law of God will not allow leniency. The law will not allow mercy. The law will not allow pardon. The law will not allow forgiveness. The law of God is utterly, inflexibly severe. Wherever sin is found, it must be punished. — *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Romans 3:19-20).

Salvation by the works of the law is a foolish absurdity. The law demands perfection or punishment. It offers no alternatives. Behold the utter severity of God's holy law, and be warned!

Divine Forgiveness

Third, this passage of Scripture teaches us much about divine forgiveness. It shows us that sin cannot be forgiven until God's broken law is silenced. — God must do something for himself before he can do anything for a sinner. Let me show you what I mean by that.

Before this woman could be forgiven, the law of God had to be dealt with. Her accusers had to be silenced. And before any of us can be forgiven, the accusations of God's law must be silenced. The law of God must be satisfied. Our Lord Jesus Christ came not to condemn, but to save. Yet, he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. Now, how could that be done? How could he fulfil the law and yet save this poor, guilty, adulterous woman? How could he fulfil the law and yet save us?

First, our Lord Jesus silenced this woman's accusers (vv. 6-9). At first, he ignored these religious hypocrites. He knew who they were, what they had done, and why they had done it. But they continued to press the issue, thinking that he was now trapped in the dilemma they had created. Then he drove away the woman's accusers.

He cast the light of judgment upon these men. Obviously, he wrote something on the ground that astonished these men, something that shocked them. He may have written some names, and times, and places involving these very men. He may have written the name of the man who was with this woman in the act of adultery. He may have written out the events exactly as they really happened. He may even have written something like this: — "Suppose a perfectly innocent one volunteer to take this woman's place? Let her go, and take me instead. I will give myself to be her Substitute."

Whatever it was that he wrote it seized these hypocrites with a legal conviction. They were pricked by their own guilty consciences. At last, they all left. There were no witnesses to accuse this woman, so the law had no claim upon her. The Lord Jesus silenced this poor woman's accusers and drove them away.

So, too, by his one, all-sufficient, sin-atoning sacrifice for us at Calvary, our Lord Jesus, our all-glorious Christ has forever silenced the claims of the law against us (Romans 8:1-4).

This is the only means by which the law of God can be satisfied and the mercy of God extended. Christ died as our Substitute under the penalty of God's holy law for us. The substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary is the only basis of divine forgiveness; and justice satisfied demands that the sinner go free (Romans 8:31-34).

Our Lord Jesus Christ freely forgave this guilty woman. She was guilty, but not condemned! The law could not condemn her; and Christ would not condemn her, so she must be pardoned. She must go free. And that is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. We were guilty. Indeed, we are guilty. But we shall never be condemned. Our sin is gone. Christ took it away. The law is silenced. It cannot charge us with sin. Justice is satisfied. Christ satisfied it.

Christ Jesus my discharge procured,
The whole of wrath Divine endured:
The law's tremendous curse He bore;
Justice can never ask for more.

Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then demand the price from me,
For whom Christ died at Calvary.

Be still, my soul, and find sweet rest —

The merits of my great High Priest,
His righteousness and precious blood,
Have satisfied the Holy God.

I'll trust Christ's efficacious blood,
And never fear the wrath of God,
Since Jesus Christ has died for me,
And lives for me to intercede.

There is no condemnation for any believer in Christ. There is no basis for condemnation. There is no condemnation now. There is no condemnation for the future.

And this pardon and forgiveness is absolutely free and unconditional. If our Lord had said, "Go and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee," the poor woman would have been without hope. But he said, "*Neither do I condemn thee.*" My pardon and forgiveness is free. "*Go and sin nor more.*"

Who shall condemn to endless flames
The chosen people of our God,
Since in the Book of Life their names
Are written clear in Jesus' blood?

He, for the sins of His elect,
Has full, complete atonement made;
And justice never can expect
That the same debt should twice be paid!

As guilty sinners, worthy of eternal damnation, we worship and praise the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, for the free, full, everlasting pardon of sin through his blood. That precious blood is the only way God can or will forgive sin. And that shed blood is effectual, securing the forgiveness of every sinner for whom the Savior died, every sinner who believes on the Son of God unto life everlasting.

Sovereign Grace

Fourth, we are here taught something about the mysterious ways of God's sovereign grace. Those Scribes and Pharisees were doing exactly what they wanted to do, without any force or compulsion except their own wicked wills. Yet, the Lord God was sovereignly controlling all the circumstances and events of the day. He was secretly working through these wicked men to bring this poor, guilty woman to her Savior. Truly, as William Cowper wrote...

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will."

This poor, guilty, trembling woman was not seeking the Lord. But he was seeking her. He had chosen her. He loved her. He was about to redeem her. And now the appointed time of grace had come. She would be

his. He used ungodly men to expose her shame. The very men who wanted her dead and sought her destruction were used by God to carry the chosen object of his sovereign love into the arms of her Savior. He used her shame to humble her. He used even her loathsome sin to bring her to himself. He wisely, graciously, sovereignly, and tenderly made her willing to embrace the Savior in the day of his power. At the time of grace, he wrought a mighty change in this woman's heart. Once she saw Christ, she hated her sin, and she fell in love with him.

True Repentance

One final thing that we are taught in this story is the nature of true repentance. The Apostle Paul tells us that there is a repentance that must be repented of, a repentance that "*worketh death*" (2 Corinthians 7:10). True repentance is much more than a mere reformation of life. It is a change of heart and attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ. In the presence of Christ this woman was convinced of her sin. She offered no plea in her own defense. She stood before the Lord silently in her guilt. The Pharisees were convinced of their guilt by their consciences. This woman was convinced of her guilt by the Savior, by Christ Jesus making himself known to her. Theirs was a legal conviction of terror. Hers was a gospel conviction of brokenness and contrition before God.

This woman recognized Christ as her Lord. She did not ask for anything. She seems to have simply waited in submission before her sovereign Master, realizing that he had the right to damn her and the power to save her. She refused to leave Christ. She was overwhelmed by his grace and conquered by his love. Her only hope was in the Savior; and she knew it. She could not leave him. She had nowhere else to go. She submitted herself to the authority and dominion of Christ the Lord. From that day forth, she took up her cross and followed him in the way.

We must place ourselves somewhere in this story. Are we like the crowd who stood watching? They witnessed forgiveness, but did not enter into it. Are we like the Scribes and Pharisees? They were in the place where grace was bestowed; but they were too proud and self-righteous to seek it. Or, are we like this poor woman, crushed with guilt before God, broken with the heavy, heavy load of guilt and sin before the Son of God, guilty, dirty, exposed, naked? If we can take our place with this poor, dirty adulterous woman before the Lord Jesus, he will forgive us too!

“I AM the Light of the World.”

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. 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: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. 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. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.” (John 8:12-20)

There is a very close affinity between light and life. Where there is no light there is no life. Light is vital to life. We see this in the very beginning of the Book of God, in the very beginning of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:3). As it was in the creation of the world, so in the new creation of grace, when the Lord God moves upon the sin-darkened heart of his chosen, when he sends his Spirit to correct the chaos of the fall in his redeemed, he causes the Light to shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God; and that Light is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament, our Lord Jesus was spoken of in type and in prophecy as the Light of Life. The Jews understood clearly that the Messiah would be the Light by which God would reveal himself to men (Isaiah 42:1-6; 49:6; 60:1-3). Christ was the pillar of fire that led and protected them. Christ was portrayed in the golden candlestick in the holy place. So, when the Lord Jesus announced in the temple treasury, “*I AM the Light of the world,*” those who heard him understood, or should have understood, that he announced himself as the Messiah, the Christ of God.¹

Dark World

First, our Lord Jesus here reminds us that this world is a place of darkness, utter darkness. It is impossible to overstate the spiritual darkness of the world in which we live. I do not suggest for a moment that people are not enlightened academically, philosophically, and politically. Multitudes are. But still “*darkness covers the face of the earth, and gross darkness the people*” (Job 5:14; 12:25; Isaiah 9:2).

What darkness, what thick, thick darkness engulfs this world! We live in a world morally degenerate and spiritually blind. What darkness people all around us live in day by day! Emotional anguish, mental torture, and domestic chaos are things with which multitudes constantly live in this world of darkness. What is the cause of the darkness? Why is it a constantly thickening blackness and darkness? — Fallen men and women are devoted to their own hearts’ lust (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Though learned in arts and sciences, the vast majority of men and women in this world know absolutely nothing about their own nature, the depravity of our race, the character of God, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, sin, righteousness and judgment, the world to come, or God’s salvation. I want to be as personal as I possibly can. If you are without Christ, you live in darkness. You have no moral compass. You have no spiritual understanding. You have no guide for life.

¹ Our Lord had been interrupted by the Pharisees who brought the adulterous woman before him. Once he had bestowed on that poor sinner the mercy and grace of free forgiveness, he walked over to the treasury (the very prominent place where the priests put the temple offering boxes), and continued preaching.

Christ the Light

Second, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Light, the only light that can dispel the darkness that engulfs your soul. Here, the Lord Jesus says of himself, — “*I AM the Light of the world.*”

John’s Gospel was specifically intended to demonstrate the eternal deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. John was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the fact that our blessed Savior is himself God. This is evident from the very first sentences of this Gospel narrative (John 1:1-5).

John tells us of seven distinct statements made by our Savior in which He used the words “*I AM*” to display his Godhead, to declare himself the self-existent God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. Every time we read where our Savior said, “*I AM*,” we should understand that he is declaring, “*I AM Jehovah-Jesus, God your Savior!*”

1. “*I AM the Bread of Life*” (John 6:48).
2. “*I AM the Light of the World*” (John 8:12).
3. “*I AM the Door*” (John 10:9).
4. “*I AM the Good Shepherd*” (John 10:11).
5. “*I AM the Resurrection and the Life*” (John 11:25).
6. “*I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14:6).
7. “*I AM the Vine*” (John 15:5).

More than 50 times John quotes the Lord Jesus saying to men, “*I am He!*” Here, in John 8:12 he calls himself “*The Light of the world,*” telling us plainly that he alone is the Light, that there is no light except him, for he is God, Jehovah, the great “*I AM!*” — “*I AM the Light of the world*” (John 9:5; 12:35, 46). John picks up this same theme in his first Epistle (1 John 1:5).

The crucified Christ is risen like the sun, to diffuse light, and life, and peace, and salvation to sin darkened souls in the midst of a dark, dark world. What the sun is to the whole solar system — the center of light, and heat, and life, and fertility — that the Sun of Righteousness is to all upon whom he shines the life-giving beams of his saving grace. The light of reason is unreasonable. The light of liberty is bondage. The light of education is ignorance. The light of conscience is unconscionable. The light of religion is blasphemy. He only is the true Light who came into the world to save sinners, who died as our Substitute on the cross, and sits at God’s right hand to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. — “*For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light*” (Psalms 36:9).

Immediately, the Pharisees jumped on our Lord with his own words (v. 13), quoting what he had said back in John 5:31. — “*If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*” But, when they thought he was trapped by his own words, our Savior seized the opportunity and asserted that he is the Son of God, One with the Father (vv. 16-18).

He was not separate from the Father when he walked through this world. He was in the Father’s bosom in heaven, as the Son of God, though as the Son of Man, our incarnate God, he was standing in front of them. And he was not alone in his testimony and judgment. Here, too, he and the Father were and are One. As the Son reveals the Father, the Father verifies the Son. So, by the very law they hoped to use against him, the Savior says to his detractors, “*the testimony of two men is true*” (v. 17; Deuteronomy 19:15). He asserted again and again that he is the Christ, the Son of God; and the Father bore witness to his claims at his baptism, on the mount of transfiguration, by the rent veil, and by the outpouring of his Spirit.

Christ Jesus, our Lord, is the Light of the World. He alone reveals God to the world, man to himself, and salvation to sinners. By his substitutionary atonement at Calvary, he alone shows us how God can be just and yet justify guilty sinners.

Christ's Followers

Third, we see here that believers are people who follow Christ. — “*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (v. 12).

To follow Christ is to commit yourself to him as your only Lord and Savior. To follow Christ is to submit yourself to him, bowing to his will and his rule. — “*Following*” is just another word for “*believing*.” It is the same act of soul, only seen from a different point of view. As Israel followed the pillar of cloud and fire in all their wilderness journey, moving whenever it moved, stopping whenever it stopped, asking no questions, marching on in faith, so we must follow Christ. Believers are people who “*follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth*” (Revelation 14:4). We follow His doctrine, his precepts, and his direction in our lives.

Those who follow Christ do “*not walk in darkness*.” They are not left in ignorance, like the many around them. They do not grope in doubt and uncertainty, like the blind man our Savior healed. They see clearly. They “*have the light of life*.” They are all taught of God. Walking in the Light we see light. We see, and see clearly who God is (Holy and Sovereign — Just and Merciful — Gracious and True). We see, and see clearly what we are. — Sinners saved by grace! We see, and see clearly who Christ is, what he did, why he did it, where he is now, and what he’s doing there. We see, and see clearly how God saves sinners (By Divine Resolve — By Divine Righteousness — By Divine Redemption — By Divine Regeneration — By Divine Resurrection).

Walking in the Light, we recognize that light has many different affects upon those upon whom it shines. Light is repulsive to creatures who love darkness. If you turn over a log in the woods, bugs will run everywhere, because they are creatures of darkness. Light is repulsive to them. In the same way, the light of the Gospel is repulsive to men and women who live in darkness (John 3:14-19).

Light is revealing to those upon whom the light shines (2 Corinthians 4:3-6). Light revives the earth, and causes it to spring with life. Just as plants grow by the light of the sun, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we walk in His light.

Light is restful. Like the light of the sun which warms us, creating a place of peace, Christ Jesus, the Light, brings us to a place of peace. We gain peace because the burden of sin is lifted and the path through life and to our eternal home is made clear and sure, all mapped out and arranged for us. We are secure in him; and that gives rest in our souls. It is like the joy and comfort of seeing the porch light at your own home after being away from your family for a while.

And light is reflected. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so when the Sun of Righteousness is risen upon the soul, the heaven born soul reflects the Light in which he lives (Matthew 5:14-16).

Not in Darkness

Fourth, those who follow Christ the Light “*shall not walk in darkness*.” We do not walk in the darkness of the unregenerate. Believers do not walk in the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of religious superstition, and the darkness of heresy. We walk in the Light of the Gospel. That means that we know who we are, whose we are, and where we are going. Though we were blind, now we see. Though once we believed not, now we know whom we have believed. Walking in the Light we know that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. We are in the covenant of grace and in the love of God, and are going to heaven and eternal happiness.

Christ is the Light that cannot be quenched. The lights with which many please themselves flicker in trial and go out in the valley of the shadow of death, and prove worse than useless. But the light that Christ is and the Light He gives shall never fail.

Know not God

Fifth, those who do not know Christ, those who do not follow the Light do not know God. Our Savior told the Pharisees standing before him that, with all their pretended light, they were utterly void of the knowledge of God (v. 19).

The Man Christ Jesus, our Mediator, the sinner's Substitute and Surety, is the only saving revelation of God. He is the Wisdom of God and the Word of God. To know him is to know God and have eternal life. To be ignorant of Christ is to be ignorant of God and dead in trespasses and in sins. May God give you grace to know him and to live by him. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit grant that we who know him and live by him may yet grow to know him who loved us and gave himself for us (Philippians 3:10).

“If God were Your Father...”

“...Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God...” (John 8:19-59)

Children almost always resemble their parents; and children of the same family almost always resemble one another. With some, the resemblance is stronger than it is with others; but it is a rare thing for children of the same family not to resemble one another, or not to resemble their parents.

In this 8th chapter of John’s Gospel, as our Savior taught in the Temple, the Pharisees, who were certain that they were distinctly the children of God, sought to discredit the Lord Jesus and tried to find a way to put him to death. These Pharisees, like the Jews as a whole, thought that they alone were the objects of God’s love and that they alone were the children of God. But the Lord Jesus stripped the mask off these hypocrites, saying to them, “*If God were your Father, ye would love me*” (v. 42). In verses 19-59 the Lord Jesus Christ shows us seven things by which the children of God in this world are always identified.

Yes, there are some things by which God’s elect are specifically identified. Yes, there are some things specifically named in Holy Scripture that always follow grace. Here are seven of those things.

1. If God were your Father, you would know the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who is born of God knows Christ (v. 19).

“*Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.*” — These men boasted about their spiritual perception, the depth of their learning, knowledge, and understanding. They boasted about their knowledge of God. They knew just about everything there was to know; and they knew it. They knew the facts of Bible history, the tribes of Israel and their land grants, their creeds and customs, laws and punishments, rituals and ceremonies, the right animals for sacrifices, the sacrifices, their sabbath days and holy days. They knew all about feasting, fasting, and tithing. They knew everything about religion except the “*one thing needful.*” They didn’t know God.

They did not know God at all. Here, our Savior tells us plainly that they did not know God, because they did not know him. Can you imagine how offended they must have been? This was to them a public scorn. The Lord Jesus publicly denounced them, their religion, and their pretence of spiritual superiority. Learn this: there is no knowledge of God apart from Christ (John 1:18; 14:6; 17:3).

If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ by God-given faith in him, you do not know God. Christ is the brightness of his Father’s glory and the express image of his person. He that has seen the Son knows the Father; and, indeed, no one can know the Father, but he to whom the Son reveals him.

Having said that, I hasten to add that it means nothing to say, “I believe in Jesus,” if we do not know him as he is revealed in the Scriptures (1 John 4:2-3; 5:1; 2 John 1:7). Acknowledging Christ in name is meaningless, if we do not know him as the Prophets and Apostles have revealed him. If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as the incarnate God, the Covenant Head of his Church, the Surety of his elect, The Law-fulfiller of his people, the mighty Sin-atoner of his chosen, and the effectual Savior of his people, you do not

know God, and you do not know his Son. If you do not know Christ as your Savior, as your only Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption, you do not know God and you do not know his Son.

Until you trust Christ alone for the whole of your acceptance before God, you are like these Pharisees, utterly ignorant of God and all things spiritual. Your trust in yourself (your knowledge, your experience, your feelings, your creedal ceremonies and religious rituals, your own righteousness, your prayers and fastings, your repentance and faith, your sorrow and tears) is proof that you neither know Christ nor the Father. All your imaginary righteousness is of no benefit to your soul, but shall be its everlasting ruin. All your imaginary good works are but works of iniquity, for which you must ever suffer the wrath of God. We must trust Christ and Christ alone, or we must forever die!

2. If God were your Father, you would persevere in grace. All who are born of God persevere in grace (vv. 30-31).

“As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” — As our Lord Jesus told his hearers about his crucifixion and the knowledge the Jews should have of him after his sacrifice at Calvary, as he set before them the excellency and divinity of his doctrine, of his mission from the Father, and of the Father’s presence with him, *“many believed on him.”* Many who heard him preach trusted him. As the gospel was preached, it came to some in power, and faith came by hearing.

As it was then, so it is today and in every day. Some believed and some believed not (Acts 28:24). *“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48).

To these new born babes in grace, the Lord Jesus declares, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”* There are two kinds of disciples: professed disciples and true disciples. True disciples continue in the doctrine of Christ. False disciples go out from among us, because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). Those who do not continue in faith, who do not persevere in the faith of the gospel never were born of God, never were true believers. — *“He that endureth to the end shall be saved”* (Matthew 10:22; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; Hebrews 3:6; 4:14; 10:23). All who are born of God, all who truly trust the Lord Jesus Christ shall persevere unto the end (Job 17:9; Psalms 1:3; 125:1; 138:8; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Isaiah 46:4; Jeremiah 32:40; Philippians 1:6).

3. If God were your Father, you would be free. All who are in Christ are the free born children of God (v. 36).

“He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman” (1 Corinthians 7:22). The Master said, *“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”* (v. 32). Then, he declares in verse 36, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”* All who are born of God are free indeed. Christ sets the captive free, free from sin, free from Satan, free from guilt, free from the law, free from the curse, free from religious bondage, free from superstition, free from the fear of death. In Christ we are free!

Free from the law’s great curse,
In Jesus we are free:
For Christ became a curse for us
And died upon the tree.
The rituals of the law
And all the law’s commands
Have been fulfilled in Christ the Lord,
Established by His hands.

No cov'nant with the law
Can now with us exist:
Complete in Christ we stand by grace,
Both free and ever blessed.
No more the dread of wrath,
No more constrained by fear,
We worship and we serve our God
With gratitude and cheer.

In Jesus we are free,
In Jesus we are free-
Free from all sin and from all guilt,
We live in liberty!
We'll join the happy song,
With all the blood-bought throng,
And sing the praises of the Lamb,
Whose grace makes us His own.

4. If God were your Father, you would do the works of Abraham. All the children of Abraham do the works of Abraham (v. 39).

“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” The Word of God tells us plainly that all who trust Christ (Jews and Gentiles), and only those who trust Christ (whether Jew or Gentile) are the children of Abraham. These Pharisees were Abraham’s physical seed. They were Jews. But the Lord Jesus declares plainly that they were not the children of Abraham. The children of Abraham are those who are the children of promise, the children of God, his spiritual children, the Church and Israel of God (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 3:29; Philippians 3:3).

What does our Savior refer to when he speaks of his people doing the works of Abraham? What are the works of Abraham? What are these works that are characteristic of all who trust Christ? The works of Abraham were works of faith and love. Those are the things that characterize all believers. These proud Pharisees, who boasted of being Abraham’s children, were trying to murder the Lord Jesus (v. 40-41); but Abraham was a man who hazarded his own life to save the lives of others. Is that not what he did when he went to war to rescue Lot?

What are the works of Abraham which are performed by all who are born of God, the works of Abraham that characterize all the children of Abraham? Abraham forsook all for Christ (Genesis 12:1-4). Abraham cherished Christ, the Sacrifice of the covenant (Genesis 15). Abraham was a magnanimous, forgiving man. We see this throughout his life and most distinctly in his treatment of Lot. Abraham was a hospitable, generous man (Genesis 18). Abraham was a man who saw the Lord Jesus, and seeing him sacrificed everything to him (Genesis 22).

5. If God were your Father, you would love the Lord Jesus Christ. All who have God for their Father truly love the Savior (v. 42).

“Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” — *“We love him, because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). We may differ on many points. But in this one thing every true child of God is like every other child of God: — *“We love him.”* We do not love him as we desire. We do not love him as we know we should. We do not love him as we soon shall. But we really do love our blessed Savior. It is not possible for a man to experience the grace of God in salvation and not love the God of all grace. It is not possible for a person to know the efficacy of Christ’s blood in his own soul and not love his gracious Redeemer. It is not possible to have a heart renewed by

the power of the Holy Spirit and not love the Spirit of life. In spite of our many weaknesses, sins, and failures, we do honestly and sincerely confess, "*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*"

We know also that we would never have loved him if he had not loved us first. The love of God for us precedes our love for him. "*He first loved us.*" He loved us before we had any desire to be loved by him. He loved us before we sought his grace. He loved us before we had any repentance or faith. He loved us before we had any being. He loved us eternally. Does he not say, "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I called thee*"? He chose us, redeemed us, and called us, because he loved us.

Not only does God's love for us precede our love for God; but God's love for us is the cause of our love for him. — "*We love him, because he first loved us.*" This heart of mine was so hard, this will was so stubborn, that I would never have loved the Lord Jesus, if he had not intervened to conquer me with his love. In the midst of my sin and corruption, he passed by and, behold, it was "*the time of love!*" The Triune Jehovah, the Lord God, the God of all grace revealed his great love for me in Christ. Beholding the crucified Christ dying in the place of sinners, the love of God conquered this rebel's heart. Trusting Christ as my only Savior, I am compelled to love him, because he first loved me. And now I know that I am what I am by the grace of God, because he loved me. Tell me, my brother, tell me my sister, is it not so with you? Every heaven-born soul can sing with Phillip Doddridge...

“Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Behold my heart and see;
And turn the dearest idol out,
That dares to rival Thee.

Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Then let me nothing love;
Dead be my heart to every joy,
When Jesus cannot move.

Is not Thy Name melodious still
To mine attentive ear?
Doth not each pulse with pleasure bound
My Savior's voice to hear?

Hast Thou a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast Thou a foe, before whose face
I fear Thy cause to plead?

Would not mine ardent spirit vie
With angels round the throne,
To execute Thy sacred will,
And make Thy glory known?

Would not my heart pour forth its blood
In honor of Thy Name?
And challenge the cold hand of death
To damp th' immortal flame?

Thou know'st I love Thee, dearest Lord,
But O, I long to soar

Far from the sphere of mortal joys,
And learn to love Thee more!”

6. If God were your Father, you would hear his Word. All who have God for their Father, all true believers, all true Christians hear God’s Word (v. 47).

“*He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*” — All saved sinners believe the gospel. They all receive, embrace, believe, and rejoice in the doctrine of God. Regenerate men and women have eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Christ. This is not true of all religionists. Many religious people, very religious people are will-worshipping Arminians. But believers “*know the truth*” (v. 32; 1 John 2:21). Tell a believer about divine sovereignty, and he will fall down and worship. Tell him about covenant grace, and he will find comfort. Tell him about electing love, and he will sing with joy. Tell him about total depravity, and he will weep as he confesses it. Tell him about effectual blood redemption, limited atonement, and he will dance like David before the Ark of God. Tell him about irresistible grace, and he will shout, “Amen!” Tell him about the security of the saints, the final perseverance of God’s elect, and he will pray for grace to honor the God of all grace!

7. If God is your Father, you shall never taste death (v. 51).

“*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*” — It is true, we shall drop these bodies of flesh; but that is not death. That is just laying aside a garment that is worn out and no longer needed or wanted. Like Enoch, we shall be translated, and never see death (John 11:26). Like Elijah, we shall be carried to heaven on a chariot of fire, and never taste death. Because the Lord Jesus tasted death for us (Hebrews 2:9), we never shall. We have everlasting life (Revelation 20:6; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

God's Works Made Manifest

“And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him...” (John 9:1-41)

The Lord Jesus performed many miracles of mercy during the three years of his earthly ministry. He turned water into wine, calmed the stormy sea, and multiplied the loaves and fishes. He healed the sick, made the deaf to hear, caused the dumb to speak, made withered arms straight, caused the lame to walk, made the blind to see, and raised the dead to life. By all these things he made manifest the fact that he is God and he is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world (Isaiah 29:18; 35:4-10; 42:6-7; Matthew 11:4-5).

Two of the Lord's miracles stand out as being of such great importance, so spiritually instructive that they each occupy an entire chapter in the volume of Holy Scripture. In the 11th chapter of John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit gives us the very instructive story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. At the outset of that chapter, we are told that Lazarus' sickness and death was “*for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*” (John 11:4).

Here, in the 9th chapter of John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit holds before us a man who was born blind, whom the Lord Jesus healed. Here, too, the entire chapter is devoted to telling us about this great miracle. Like the resurrection of Lazarus, this man's healing is full of instruction for our souls. And, as we are told that Lazarus' sickness and death was “*for the glory of God,*” we read in John 9:3 that this man's blindness was designed and intended “*that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*” This great miracle is intended to illustrate and make manifest the works of God our Savior in saving his people from their sins.

“Jesus Passed By”

The story of this blind man's healing begins with the Lord Jesus. How appropriate! The fact is everything begins with God our Savior. Before we read about this man, his blindness, or his healing, the Spirit of God tells us, “*And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man.*” It was the Lord Jesus passing by and seeing him that led to the mercy he obtained. So it is in grace. There are no advances made by sinners to the Lord, until the Lord passes by and bids the sinner live. Salvation begins with God coming to man, not with man coming to God (Ezekiel 16:1-14). If we love him, it is because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The Son of God hid himself from those Pharisees in the Temple who despised him (John 8:59). He passed by them in judgment, leaving them to themselves steeped in religion and sealed to everlasting destruction in reprobation. Grace is always distinct, particular, and distinguishing. — “*And as Jesus passed by*” those men in judgment, he passed by this man in mercy. He passed by our souls in eternal election and chose us unto salvation. He passed by our souls in predestination and arranged all things for our everlasting salvation. He passed by our souls at the appointed time of love and called us by his grace. There's hope for sinners when the Lord Jesus passes by. Bartimaeus understood that. — “*And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me*” (Mark 10:47).

Reach out and touch the Lord
As He passes by!
You'll find He's not too busy
To hear your heart's cry.
He's passing by this moment
Your needs to supply,

So reach out and touch the Lord
As He goes by!

“He saw a Man”

Next, we read, “*He saw a man which was blind from his birth.*” The word translated “*saw*” carries the idea of staring, gazing upon, and watching. It also carries the idea of discerning, understanding, and knowing. Blessed are those people who are under the watchful eye of the Son of God! The Savior “*saw a man.*” He saw who he was. He saw where he was. He saw what he was. He saw all that he had done. He saw all that he had been. He saw that he was blind. And he saw all that he would do for this man! We see a similar passage in Luke 15:11-20, where the Spirit of God gives us our Savior’s parable of the prodigal son.

The sovereignty of God in the exercise of his grace is exemplified in this 9th chapter of John’s Gospel. The Savior saw the man; the man did not see him. The man did not call upon the Lord to have mercy upon him; the Lord was the one to take the initiative. That is the way it always is. — “*Salvation is of the LORD!*”

“Blind from Birth”

This man, we are expressly told by God the Holy Spirit, “*was blind from his birth.*” There is much to be learned from what is here stated about this man’s blindness.

“And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? *Jesus* answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (vv. 1-3).

The disciples thought, like most people, that bodily afflictions come upon people because of sinful behavior, that sickness is an indication of divine displeasure and disapproval. Such thinking is wrong and betrays an underlying sense of superiority and self-righteousness.

The Lord’s words in verse 3 do not suggest that the man and his parents were not sinners; for both were guilty of original sin, and both had committed actual transgressions (Romans 3:23; 5:12). The Master was simply declaring that it was not his parents’ particular sin nor his own that was the cause of his blindness. We know, of course, that all sickness and death are the result of sin. Were there no sin, there would be no sickness and no death. But the assumption that sickness is an indication of God’s judgment is a display of proud ignorance. That was the error of Job’s three friends. Charismatic, Pentecostal, fake-healers teach the same foolishness.

The fact is this man’s blindness, we are specifically told, was for the purpose of God’s works being made manifest in him. His blindness was designed for his mercy. His blindness was an act of God’s prevenient grace, by which God paved the way for the saving operations of his grace. His blindness was by the special arrangement of divine providence (Romans 8:28). The fact is, for God’s elect, all our afflictions are designed and brought to pass for our everlasting benefit (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1; 1 Peter 1:2-7).

Let us never imagine that anything comes to pass by accident, or without divine design. Many seem terribly confused by the fact of the fall and of sin’s entrance into the world. They seem to think that Adam’s fall took God by surprise, and that the Creator lost control of his creation when sin entered. But that is not the case at all. When Lucifer fell, it was by divine purpose; and when Adam fell, it was by divine purpose (Isaiah 14:12-14, 24, 26-27; Psalm 76:10; Romans 11:33-36).

Just as this man's blindness made a way for God to display his works in him, the sin and fall of our father Adam, and the ruin of the human race in Adam's fall were designed by our God to make a way for the manifestation of his works of grace in Christ, of whom Adam was a type (Romans 5:14), to the praise of the glory of his grace (Romans 5:12-21).

Moreover, this man's blindness represents the spiritual blindness of all men by nature. This man's blindness of body gave occasion for the works of God to be made manifest in him. So, also, the blindness of soul affords opportunity for God in Christ to be magnified in the works of grace. We are all born in a state of spiritual blindness, a blindness from which we can never be delivered except by the Son of God. All are by nature blind to the knowledge of God the Father, — blind to his everlasting love, — blind to the Person, work, grace, mercy, favor, and all the ten thousand beauties and excellencies which are in God the Son in his mediatorial character, as Head and Husband of his Church and people, — blind to everything relating to the eternal power and Godhead of the blessed Spirit, both in his own essence and glory and in his grace and mercy to chosen sinners, blind to our own utterly lost, ruined and undone condition, — blind to our need of a Savior, and even blind to our blindness!

“Must Work”

“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (vv. 4-5). — Oh, how I like what I read here! The Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, our Mediator, our covenant Surety, the sinners' Substitute, speaks of the work he did upon this earth as a work that had to be done, a work that he *“must work,”* a work that he must finish before he could leave this world and return to his Father and our Father, who sent him. Jehovah's Servant must finish his work (John 10:14-18). And finish it he did!

- Righteousness is finished!
- Satisfaction is finished!
- Redemption is finished!
- Justification is finished!
- Forgiveness is finished!
- Sanctification is finished!
- Salvation is finished!

Our message is *“the gospel,”* good news, not good advice! The Lord Jesus said, *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). What could be more blessed? Redemption-work is finished. The Church of Christ is saved. Jehovah is glorified. — *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”* (Isaiah 52:7)

“Go Wash”

In verses 6 and 7, the Lord Jesus used very unlikely means to perform his miracle of mercy on this poor, blind man. — *“When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”*

Our Savior used means that had no virtue or healing power in themselves; and the means used were both foolish and distasteful to the natural mind. So it is that by the preaching of the gospel, by the foolishness of preaching, spiritually blind and dead sinners are made to see and live. Gospel preaching is foolishness to the world; but it is the power of God unto salvation to those who are saved (1 Corinthians 1:18-24).

Let us understand that the means used are useless, without the blessing of God upon them. The clay and the pool of Siloam, like gospel preaching, were merely instruments in the hand of Christ. But without him the clay would only have been a greater obstruction to sight, not a means of giving sight. So it is that that which we call the means of grace, without his blessing, tend more to increase spiritual blindness than remove it (2 Corinthians 2:15-16; Revelation 3:18).

“Dost thou believe?”

This man experienced an extraordinary miracle, a miracle that could not be denied. It was such an extraordinary thing that it brought him into conflict with the Pharisees. The Pharisees reviled him and finally excommunicated him. But he stood by his experience. He said, “Nothing like this has ever happened to anyone in the history of the world. I know that I was born blind. I know that I now see. And I know that the man who did this great work for me and in me is of God.” But that is not salvation. It takes more than a miracle, even a notable miracle, to produce faith in the heart of a man. Saving faith is the gift of God. It comes only by divine revelation. Faith comes only by Christ revealing himself to us and in us by his omnipotent mercy and irresistible grace.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him” (vv. 35-38).

This man had received sight; but he must have Christ revealed to him in order to believe on him as Prophet, Priest, and King; and Christ is revealed by the hearing of the Word (Romans 10:9-17). God saves sinners by the means he has ordained; and that means is the preaching of the gospel (1 Peter 1:23-25).

“Made Blind”

Now, look at verses 39-41, and learn that the very gospel that God uses to cause the blind to see, he uses to make those blind who think they see.

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.”

Our Lord’s judgment upon these Pharisees and his mercy upon the man born blind reminds me of the cloud in the camp of Israel that gave light to Israel, while engulfing Egypt in darkness (Exodus 14:19-20). Christ is the Rock of ages; the sure Foundation Jehovah has laid in Zion. “*He that believeth shall never be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end.*” And he is a “*stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.*” On whomsoever he shall fall, “*it will grind him to powder*” (Deuteronomy 32:4. Isaiah 28:16. 1 Peter 1:6-8. Matthew 21:44).

“Who *is* this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this *that is* glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance *is* in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.” (Isaiah 63:1-4)

“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” God help you to believe. As this blind man was healed on the sabbath day (v. 14), on the day you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your everlasting sabbath begins (Matthew 11:28-30).

The True Shepherd and the False

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”

(John 10:1-6)

The Lord God made a promise to his church in Jeremiah 3:15. It is a promise made to those people to whom the God of heaven declares, *“I am married unto you...I will bring you to Zion.”* This is God’s promise to his people for all time. — *“I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”*

Those pastors who are the ascension gifts of Christ to his church, who are pastors after God’s own heart, feed the sheep with knowledge, gospel knowledge, Bible knowledge, the knowledge of God, of Christ, of grace, and knowledge of man in his fallen state and in his redeemed state. They constantly proclaim the Word of the Lord. They constantly call eternity bound sinners to Christ, and urge God’s people to *“walk in the old paths, where is the good way”* that you may *“find rest for your souls.”* They feed God’s people with understanding, too, understanding you, understanding the things of God, and understanding the times.

When the Lord God gives his church pastors after his own heart, who feed his sheep with knowledge and understanding, his sheep shall *“fear no more, are no longer dismayed, neither shall they be lacking”* (Jeremiah 23:4). Blessed are those people, blessed is that church to whom God gives such a pastor!

What kind of pastor is he who is the gift of God to his people? These first six verses of John 10 show us. The word *“pastor”* simply means *“shepherd.”* Christ himself is the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, and the Great Shepherd of the sheep. All faithful pastors are but under shepherds, men to whom the Lord Jesus entrusts the care of his sheep, men responsible to feed his sheep with knowledge and understanding, men responsible to guide his sheep and protect his sheep. In this tenth chapter of John’s Gospel, our Lord Jesus uses himself as the example, the pattern, the standard, by which all true shepherds are identified and known.

Context

It is impossible to understand the message of our Lord in this parable, if we fail to see the context in which it is given. In this parable our Master is distinctly addressing the Pharisees, religious leaders who use their office for their own gain, who come only to rob, and steal, and kill, those false shepherds who use and abuse his sheep.

In the ninth chapter, after our Lord healed the blind man, the Pharisees, fearing they might lose power, position, and influence, put him out of the synagogue (John 9:39-41). Then the Master said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”* How those words must have stung those thieves and robbers, those destroyers of men’s souls, those false shepherds!

Here is the false shepherd. — *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”* With those words, our Master describes every false shepherd. Here is the true shepherd. *“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”* With those words, the Lord Jesus describes himself and every true shepherd of the sheep.

The False Shepherd

First, our Savior describes every false shepherd, every false prophet, every false preacher. The most dangerous thing in this world is a false prophet, a false shepherd. The Pharisees of our Lord's day were all false shepherds. But we are plainly and repeatedly warned in the Word of God that throughout the ages of time, until the very last day, false prophets and false shepherds, like those Pharisees, will only increase. And, like those Pharisees, the false shepherds will always be recognized, applauded, and promoted by a lost religious world; and the true shepherd will always be despised ((Matthew 24:24; Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18; 4:1; 2 John 1:7)

Who is the false shepherd? The false shepherd is described in many ways in the Scriptures; but in the passage before us the Lord Jesus lays the axe to the root of the tree and tells us that all false shepherds that will ever be in the world are those who enter not by the door, but climb up some other way into the sheepfold.

The false shepherd is one who refuses to enter the kingdom of God by Christ the Door. He is a lost, self-righteous man, one who going about to establish his own righteousness, refuses to submit to and trust the righteousness of God.

There can be no question about this. Our Lord tells us plainly that he is the Door. — *“I am the Door; by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture”* (v 9). So the one great mark by which false shepherds are identified is that they enter not by the Door: — *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber”* (v. 1). This is the identifying mark of every false shepherd. — He is not saved himself. He is a lost, unbelieving rebel.

He enters not in by the Door. He makes another way into the sheepfold. He offers another hope, another mediator. Truly, these are perilous times! Christ says, *“I am the Way.”* The false shepherd says, *“There are other ways.”* Christ declares, *“It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”* The false shepherd says, *“God has done everything he can. Now, it's all up to you.”* Christ says, *“I lay down my life for the sheep.”* The false shepherd says, *“Christ died for everyone.”* Christ says, *“By my own blood, I have purchased forgiveness, put away sin, obtained eternal redemption, made an end of transgression, and brought in everlasting righteousness.”* The false shepherd says, *“Forgiveness, righteousness and redemption are possible since Christ died, if you will only accept it.”* Christ says, *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.”* The false shepherd says, *“The Spirit wants to quicken; but it is really the will of your own flesh that profits you with salvation and eternal life.”*

Antichrist

The false shepherd is antichrist. Antichrist is not a single figure in a red suit with horns, a tail, a pitch fork, and the number 666 tattooed on his forehead. Antichrist is often represented as one man; but really he is many. Antichrist is all freewill, works religion, and any who promote it.

Our Lord here speaks of one false shepherd, rather than of many, because all false shepherds are really one. All false shepherds are antichrist. All false shepherds are the man of sin. They all come into the sheepfold, the churches of Christ, by climbing over the wall, refusing to enter by Christ, the Door. Paul, Peter, and Jude describe them as those who sneak into the church under false pretense as the servants of God, those who come into the church *“privily”* as promoters of righteousness.

The false shepherd is that man who would turn you away from the gospel of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another (Galatians 1:6-9). The false shepherd is one who tries to corrupt your mind from the simplicity that is in Christ, preaching another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

The apostle Paul spoke of a day when the man of sin must be revealed, and clearly identified him in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Here he is. You have seen him and heard him many times. You can find him in almost every place where men and women gather for worship. He is that one — *“Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”* (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 13:1-2).

There is no question but that the great enemy of the sheep, the false shepherd, who comes like a lamb, but who has the paw of a bear, is Antichrist. He is empowered and directed by Satan himself. The false shepherd is antichrist. He is the preacher of freewill-works religion, the religion of man. Paul tells us in Romans 1 that that religion that changes the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible man, that religion that turns the truth of God into a lie, that religion that worships and serves the creature more than the Creator is the judgment of God upon a generation that refused to receive the love of the truth. The fruit of such religion is a constantly increasing moral degeneracy that is ultimately manifest in homosexuality and every imaginable deviant behavior.

Really, sodomy is but a reflection of freewill-works religion. It is a pretense of love that involves no commitment. It is a union of men that can never produce life. It is the result of man’s high opinion of himself, the fruit and exercise of his own will. It constantly seeks to recruit others. And it is condemned by God.

If we are saved from this curse, the curse of antichrist’s religion, the only reason you and I are not engulfed in it is this: — *“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 13-14).

What is the false shepherd’s object? What does he come to do? I often hear and read what others say when warning us of false prophets. They couch their warnings in such phrases that you would almost think they are saying, “These men really are not so bad. Really, they are fine, fine brethren, whose brains are just a little muddled.” Our Lord does not speak like that at all. Does he?

The Master says, of every false shepherd, *“the same is a thief and a robber”* (v. 1). In verse 10 he says, *“The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”*

Satan’s great object in this world is to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. That is the object of antichrist. That is the object of all false shepherds. They are God’s enemies, Christ’s enemies; and you ought to count them as your enemies. David did, and so did Paul (Psalms 139:21-22; Galatians 5:12). They come for the express purpose of robbery and destruction, to rob God of his throne, to rob Christ of his glory, to rob the Son of God of his seed, his satisfaction for his soul’s travail, to rob you and your children of the Way of life, to rob you of the only Door unto the Father, to rob you of redemption, salvation, forgiveness, peace, and eternal life, and to destroy your soul (Matthew 23:13).

Be warned. Flee, flee from antichrist! Flee from all freewill-works religion. Flee from every false shepherd. Twice, the wise man warns us to flee from that way which seems right to a man, because the end of that way are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Be Warned

Beware of false shepherds. They always come in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Their object is to devour and destroy by mixing works with grace, mingling law with the gospel, calling bondage liberty and liberty licentiousness, making salvation in some way, in some part, to some degree, to be dependent upon and determined by you, — your will, your work, your worth, your experience, and your learning.

The True Shepherd

Second, the Lord Jesus describes himself and every true shepherd.

“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (vv. 2-5).

The shepherd of the sheep is Christ himself. He says in verse 11, “*I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*” In verse 14 he says, “*I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*” He is the Good Shepherd because he died for his sheep. The sheep were condemned to die; but he died in our room and stead that we might live forever. He is the Good Shepherd because he seeks his sheep until he finds it. We were lost; but he sought us and found us. He is the Good Shepherd because, when he finds his sheep that was lost, he lays it upon his omnipotent shoulders, holds it in the grip of almighty grace, and carries it all the way home.

Christ is the true Shepherd. But, remember, his purpose in this parable is to show us a clear distinction between true shepherds and the false, between true pastors and the false. He uses himself as the example all true under shepherds follow. What does our Savior tell us about the true shepherd, the true pastor?

The true shepherd is one who enters into the sheepfold by the Door (v. 2). — “*He that entereth in by the Door is the shepherd of the sheep.*” The door spoken of in verse 2 is commonly thought to be the Word of God. And it is certainly correct to say that Christ came by the Word of God, fulfilling all the Scriptures. But our Lord tells us plainly in verse 9 — “*I am the Door.*” How are we to understand this? Is he the Door? Yes. Did he enter by the Door? Indeed, he did. That's exactly what he did.

“Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*” (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Our Savior showed himself the Good Shepherd by entering in by the Door, the same Door through which we must enter the kingdom of God; that is, “*by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*” True, if he had remained without his taking our sins upon him and making them his own, he would not need to have entered in, but he was made sin for us. — He could not enter in any other way. But (Blessed be his name forever!) “*by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*”

This is the first mark of every true shepherd Christ sends to tend his sheep. He comes in by the Door, by the blood of Christ. He speaks of sin, because he has seen its greatness. He speaks of pardon, because he has been forgiven. He proclaims free justification by the blood, because he is justified. He proclaims perfect righteousness, because Christ has been made righteousness to him. He preaches free grace, because he has been saved by free grace. He preaches the precious blood, because he has felt its power. He tells sinners of a new

creation, because he experiences it. He preaches eternal security, because he is secure on the Shepherd's shoulders, in the Shepherd's grip.

"He that entereth in by the door is the Shepherd of the sheep." — Without this, no other qualification will do. All the learning a man can attain in college, or seminary, or by his own diligent study can never make him a pastor. All the eloquence in the world will never make a preacher. He who serves as Christ's shepherd must enter by the Door of the sheep.

The true shepherd is one who cares for the sheep. — *"To him the porter openeth"* (vv. 3-4)." The Holy Spirit opens the way for Christ. He also opens the way for his servants, his true shepherds. — *"And the sheep hear his voice."* The sheep hear the Shepherd's voice, his Gospel. They hear his voice through the lips of his true shepherds, faithful pastors (1 John 4:5-6).

"And he calleth his own sheep by name." — Without question, this speaks of our Savior's personal, particular, effectual call of his elect to life and faith in him by the power of his Holy Spirit. It also shows the complete knowledge Christ has of his sheep. He says, *"I know them"* (v. 27). When Zacchaeus was a straying sheep, Christ said to him when he was up the tree, — *"Zacchaeus, Come down; for today I must abide at thine house"* (Luke 19:5). When Nathaniel was a straying sheep under the fig-tree, Christ *"saw him"* (John 1:48). After his resurrection, he saw Mary and said to her, *"Mary,"* and she turned herself and said unto him, *"Rabboni: which is to say, Master"* (John 20:16). So it is still. Christ knows his sheep; and he calls his own sheep by name; and they follow him.

This also implies the love of Christ for his sheep. When you love someone, you love their name. Christ not only knows you, but he calls you by name. The Lord Jesus Christ loves the names of those for whom he died. Your name is graven on his heart, and on the palms of his hands.

But there is more here. Our Savior gives his sheep a new name. He said to Abram, *"Thy name shall no more be called Abram, but Abraham shall thy name be"* (Genesis 17:5). He said to Jacob, *"Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed"* (Genesis 33:28). He said to Cephas, *"Thy name shall be called Peter"* (John 1:42), which means a stone, a living stone in the house of God. When the Lord Jesus calls his sheep, they get a new name. Indeed, *"old things are passed away; and, behold, all things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And, when we come to the temple above, he says, *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name"* (Revelation 3:12). If you hear his voice and follow him, you have a new name, a name given to you by God himself. It is the name he gives his own darling Son, — *"The Lord our Righteousness"* (Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16).

Those who are Christ's true shepherds, like Christ the Good Shepherd, love, care for, and are sympathetic with his sheep. Faithful pastors understand and know that Christ's sheep are just sheep, sinful, weak, defiled, and helpless, because they, too, are his sheep. But, like Christ, they call his sheep by his new name. They are his saints. Indeed, they are one with him, so thoroughly one with him that anything done for them is done for him; and anything done to them is done to him (2 Corinthians 6:11-12).

This is the lesson exemplified by our Savior in this parable, the lesson the Pharisees could not grasp, the lesson the religious leaders of our age cannot grasp, the lesson all who serve as his under shepherds must grasp. — If we would influence men and women for good, if we would lead people, if we are to have any power with them, we must lead them by their hearts, with the power of love, and care, and sympathy. They must be convinced that we care for them.

The power to lead men lies in sympathizing with them, as one who walks in the same path with them. The man of influence is the man of sympathy. The man of power is the man of service. He that loves is he that leads. He that serves is he that rules. The hearts of men cannot be moved by mere external force or power. The heart cannot be influenced by mere logic, reason, and dogma. Hearts are moved by hearts!

You may chain the limbs of a man; you may coerce his actions or even his words by religious creeds, religious rules, intimidation or fear. But how can soul be in communion with soul, move the will and win the affections? There is only one way. If we would influence men intimately, profoundly, really, we must enter into sympathy with them. No man is or can be a true shepherd of the sheep who has not entered the same Door, who does not walk in the same path, who is not himself one with the sheep.

This is the lesson our Master taught and confirmed by his own example. The Good Shepherd proved himself to be the Good Shepherd, and illustrated what a true shepherd is by his care, tenderness, sympathy, and love toward his sheep. He lived for them, walked with them, toiled, and hungered, and suffered with them.

Our blessed good Shepherd was and is one with his sheep. He entered into mortal life through a mother's womb, just as we do. He passed through life by the same path of toil and daily care as we do. He made his exit from this world through the same portal of suffering and death as we must. In life and death he walked with the sheep. Therefore, He could say, "I am the Good Shepherd, not merely because I am commissioned and sent of my Father, not merely because I wield the power of omnipotence," but "*I am the Good Shepherd,*" he said, because "*I know my sheep and am known of mine.*"

Here is another character of the true shepherd. — "*He goeth before them*" (v. 4). The shepherd always goes before the sheep; and they follow him. When he says, "Let us go to the well," they follow him. When he says, "Let us go down into that dark valley," they go after him. So it is with Christ. Christ never called a sheep to go where he never went himself. He has borne all that he calls his sheep to bear. Our Savior went into the depths of sorrow, heart sorrow, soul sorrow, the very sorrow of hell for his sheep. Let us not be surprised when he calls us to suffer. We will not be called to go where he has not gone. Do not be afraid to put down your tender feet where he put down his. It is still true that he goes before you. Do not be afraid. Christ is always with you and is always before you (Isaiah 43:2).

So it is with all Christ's true shepherds. They are men who go before and lead the sheep. They do not whip the sheep, beat the sheep, bind the sheep, frighten the sheep, and drive the sheep. They go before the sheep, leading them (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Here is one more great distinction between the true shepherd and the false. — "*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (vv. 10-15). Hirelings are just hirelings. They do not care for the sheep. Because they do not care for the sheep, they will abandon them whenever they can serve their own interests better by doing so. Not the good Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus came into this world, lived for, and gave his life for the sheep that they might have life. And all his true shepherds follow his example. The true shepherd's life is wrapped up in the sheep, in serving their eternal interests. The true shepherd is worthy of his hire; but he is no hireling. The true shepherd gives and lays down his life for the sheep.

Are you following Christ? Do you hear his voice in the Word? Do you hear his voice in the preaching of the gospel? Do you follow him? Follow on to know the Lord fully. Soon we shall be where no tempting devil, no deceiving world, and no false shepherds are found. There we shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed us, and shall lead us unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:16-17). In that great eternal day, there will be no more need of us under shepherds; for in that great eternal day there shall be one fold and one shepherd!

Chapter 63

The Sheep

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”

(John 10:1-6)

There are some people among the fallen sons of Adam whom God almighty has purposed to save. They are called “*his own sheep*.” These sheep are sinners loved of God with an everlasting love, chosen by him unto salvation, and redeemed by Christ the Good Shepherd. They shall, each of them, be called to life and faith in Christ by the power of God’s irresistible grace at his appointed time and preserved in him unto everlasting glory.

Sheep and Goats

According to the Word of God, the whole human race is divided into two categories: sheep and goats. Sheep never become goats; and goats never become sheep. Our Lord plainly tells us that some men and women are his sheep; and some are not his sheep. Some are goats (Matthew 25:31-33; John 10:16, 26). This division of the human race was made in eternity in God’s sovereign purpose of grace in eternal election. He chose some to salvation and passed by others.

This division is made manifest in time, at the time of love, when the sheep are called by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel to life and faith in Christ. The call of the Spirit and our resulting faith in Christ do not make the division or make us sheep; but the call of God and the gift of faith in Christ make the division manifest, and make it manifest that we are Christ’s sheep, chosen, redeemed, and called by grace.

This division of the human race is a permanent, immutable division. — Sheep never become goats; and goats never become sheep.

Lost and Found

As the human race is divided into two categories (sheep and goats), so, too, the Lord’s sheep are divided into two categories: straying sheep and returned sheep, lost sheep and found sheep, wandering sheep and folded sheep. This is what Peter tells us in 1st Peter 2:25. — “*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*”

Whenever I preach the gospel, my mind is upon the sheep. My heart is fixed upon the sheep. I am not much interested in goats. I am on the trail of Christ’s sheep. I have nothing for goats. And I am not disturbed by goats. My business is with sheep. I am seeking the Lord’s sheep who are lost. I am sent of God to feed those sheep who are in the fold. Having my mind and heart fixed upon the sheep, I know that I have a good and noble object, and that I am in harmony with the will of the Shepherd, because the Shepherd’s mind is ever upon his sheep. The Shepherd’s heart is always upon his sheep. The Good Shepherd’s glory is wrapped up in and is one with the salvation of his sheep.

Four Ways

The Lord Jesus often speaks of “*my sheep*.” He calls his people “*his own sheep*.” But how did he get his sheep? How did those who are his sheep come to be his sheep? I can find only four ways by which a shepherd can obtain the possession of sheep. Here are four ways in which God’s elect belong to Christ as sheep belonging to a shepherd.

1. A man can come into the possession of sheep by a gift; and we were given to Christ as his sheep from eternity in the covenant of grace, and in time by the effectual call of the Holy Spirit (John 6:37-40). Those the Father gave to the Son from eternity, and those he is now giving to the Son in effectual calling, and those who come to believe on the Son by the gift of his grace, and those whom it is the Father’s will that Christ raise up to eternal life at the last day are all the same people. They are “*his own sheep!*”
2. A man may also obtain the possession of sheep by lawful purchase; and the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Good Shepherd, purchased his sheep out of the hands of divine justice by the lawfully demanded price of his own precious blood (John 10:11, 15).
3. *Third*, if a man owns a flock of sheep and those sheep give birth to other sheep, then the new born lambs belong to the original owner by birth. So it is that we belong to Christ instrumentally by birth, too (Isaiah 66:8).
4. And, *fourth*, a man may become the owner of sheep by inheritance. If the original owner gives his sheep to another person as his inheritance, then the sheep become his property by inheritance. We are the inheritance of our dear Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are called “*God’s heritage*” (1 Peter 5:3; Ephesians 1:18; Psalm 2:8).

10 Bible Descriptions

I have searched the Scriptures and found ten things plainly revealed in the Word of God about those people who are called by the Son of God “*his own sheep*.”

1st All who belong to Christ as his sheep are chosen sheep (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Sheep love the doctrine of election. We know that had there been no election of grace there would have been no salvation by grace. Election is the sheep’s friend. And all sheep are the friends of election. They all confess...

“‘Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be.
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me.
My heart owns none before Thee.
For Thy rich grace I thirst,
This knowing—If I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first.”

2nd All the Lord’s sheep are, by nature, straying sheep (Isaiah 53:6). “Sheep” — A more suitable word could not be found to describe us. It is ever the nature of sheep to stray. We went astray in our father Adam. We went astray from the womb, speaking lies. We went astray all the days of our lives, by willful, deliberate choice, each one to his own way, until God the Holy Spirit arrested us by his almighty grace (Ephesians 2:1-5).

We all know what it is to stray. None of us know how to return. Even after experiencing the grace of God in salvation, it is still the nature of our evil hearts to stray from our God. And, even now, when we stray,

we would never return to him if he did not fetch us back to himself. Even now, we are compelled to cry, “*Turn us, O God of our salvation and we shall be turned. Draw me, and we will run after thee.*”

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart. Oh, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above!”

None of the Lord’s saved sheep have any problem with the doctrine of total depravity. It is the bitter reality of our daily experience!

3rd I rejoice to read in the Word of God that all the Lord’s sheep are redeemed sheep (John 10:11, 15).

“Redeemed! How I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed by His special atonement!
His child and forever I am!”

We have been eternally redeemed (Revelation 13:8), justly redeemed (Romans 3:24-26), particularly redeemed (John 10:25), vicariously redeemed (Galatians 3:13), and effectually redeemed (Hebrews 9:12). Talk to sheep about limited atonement, and they will rejoice. Tell them about effectual blood, and they will sing. Proclaim to sheep how that they have been particularly redeemed, and they will shout, “Hallelujah!” And they will honor the man who preaches that message as God’s messenger to their souls. Sheep honor the Shepherd’s precious blood.

4th At God’s appointed time, in the time of love, each and every one of those chosen, redeemed, straying sheep are called sheep (John 0:2-4). The Good Shepherd always seeks his sheep “*‘til he find it.*” And when he finds it, he always fetches it home by his almighty, effectual, irresistible call. This irresistible call is what David described as fetching grace, when he commanded Ziba, his servant, to go bring Mephibosheth to his palace, saying, “*Fetch him!*” So it is, in the time of love, that the Lord Jesus sends his Spirit to his chosen, redeemed, straying sheep, saying “*Fetch him.*”

Notice how the Good Shepherd describes this call here in John 10:2-4. Our Good Shepherd calls “*his own sheep.*” He never calls goats, but only “*his own sheep,*” his personally chosen, redeemed, predestinated sheep. When he calls his sheep, “*they hear his voice.*” He never calls in vain. “*He calleth his own sheep by name.*” That is a particular, personal, effectual call. And when the Son of God calls his sheep, he always “*leadeth them out.*” His call is an almighty, effectual, irresistible call.

God’s sheep rejoice in the knowledge of his almighty, irresistible grace. What sane man would quarrel with irresistible love? What sane man would be angered by infallible grace? What man in his right mind would ever get upset with a friend who snatched him from the jaws of death, when he was both unaware of his condition and unwilling and unable to do anything about it?

5th Every one of the Lord’s sheep are specially known sheep (John 10:27). The Lord Jesus says, “*I know them.*” The world does not know them (1 John 3:1). Before they are called, the church does not know them, the preacher does not know them, and they do not know themselves. Sometimes even after they are called churches and preachers do not know them. But Christ says, “*I know them.*” And that is enough! He knows them eternally. He knows them distinctively (Matthew 7:23; Romans 8:29). He knows them universally. He knows them wherever they are and knows everything about them. And he knows them savingly. All who are known by him are saved by him.

The Lord's sheep rest in his love. We rest in his distinguishing knowledge of us. It is his knowledge of us, not our knowledge of him, that is the source and cause of our salvation, justification, eternal life, and assurance. The experience of eternal life is found in our knowing him; but the cause is in his knowledge of us. (Isaiah 53:10-11).

6th Our Lord Jesus declares that all his sheep are knowing sheep (John 10:14). Not only does The Good Shepherd know his sheep, he says, "*I am known of mine.*" They know him and "*they know his voice*" (John 10:4). The Apostle John explains this for us in 1st John 2:20-27. Goats are driven to and fro with every wind of doctrine, because they do not know the Shepherd's voice. Sheep, all of them, know the Shepherd's voice and follow it (John 10:4-5).

7th The Word of God tells us that all of the Lord's sheep, as soon as they are called, are folded sheep (Ezekiel 34:11-15). When the Lord calls his sheep, he brings them into his fold. It seems to me that he is telling us here that he brings his sheep into his church. I realize that all true believers, when they are born of God are born into the church and kingdom of God. But Ezekiel's prophecy refers not to the church in its universal aspect, but to the local church. So that the promise is this: — I will bring my sheep into the fold of a local church. Here he feeds them in a good pasture, refreshes them with living water, and causes them to lie down in peace and safety in this good fold.

I realize that many make light of believer's baptism and church membership. I recognize that neither baptism nor church membership has anything to do with our salvation. But we must never be seduced into thinking that the ordinances of Christ and the church of Christ are non-essentials. I cannot find in the Word of God any evidence that the Lord's sheep are found outside his fold once they have been called Ezekiel 20:37-38). All Christ's sheep follow him into the watery grave of believer's baptism. And all Christ's sheep dwell with him and his sheep in the fold. Sheep need each other. They are never found alone unless they are either lost or sick.

8th All the Lord's sheep are following sheep (John 10:4, 27). None of the sheep follow the Shepherd by nature. Yet, our Lord says, "*They follow me.*" How can both things be true? The answer is simple. The Shepherd causes the sheep to follow. Yet, he causes them to do so in such a way as to make them perfectly willing to follow him. He entices the sheep to follow him by his goodness. He lovingly forces his sheep to follow him with his rod. But the sheep, all the sheep, do follow the Shepherd. They follow the doctrine and counsel of his word, the direction of his Spirit and the revelation of his will. They all "*follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*" (Revelation 14:3-4).

9th Our Lord Jesus assures us that all his sheep are secure sheep (John 10:28-30). In this world the sheep must face many dangers. Many wolves seek to devour them. Their own flesh is ever opposed to them. The devil seeks by every means to destroy them. And the world, both the religious world and the material world, are instruments by which our adversary the devil seeks our ruin. But in the midst of all our enemies and all our dangers, all the sheep are perfectly safe. We are in the hands of our dear, almighty Shepherd. And he and his Father are one. That is a simple declaration that our security is to be found in the Persons of the triune Godhead. The Father's purpose cannot be defeated. The Son's blood cannot be wasted. The Spirit's seal cannot be broken. Immutable grace cannot be altered. Omnipotent power cannot be subdued. The will of God cannot be resisted.

10th The Word of God speaks of some sheep in a very singular way. They are called "*other sheep*" (John 10:16). Our Savior says, "*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.*" These other sheep belong to Christ as surely as the rest. The other sheep have been redeemed by Christ. The other sheep are safe and secure in the hands of Christ. The other sheep shall be effectually called by Christ. If you are one of these "*other sheep*," the Good Shepherd says concerning you, "*Them also I must bring.*" If you are one of these "*other sheep*," the Good Shepherd will get you. He will return you to himself.

“I Am the Door”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.” (John 10:1-10)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great “*I AM*,” the one true and living God who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, and revealed himself by that name, saying, — “*I AM that I am*.” He is the eternal, self-existent God. In the New Testament he reveals himself with profound simplicity as the “*I AM*” ((John 6:35; 8:12; 9:5; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

In all those places our Master showed himself to be the Master of simplicity. That means he was also the Master Preacher. He seldom used words with more than two or three syllables. He never once appeared scholastic. He never attempted to impress his hearers with what he knew. His intent was to be heard and understood. So he always spoke with great plainness and simplicity. He had no use for rhetoric or eloquence. He did not attempt to prove or enforce his doctrine with complex arguments. He simply declared it. And he declared it with utter simplicity. Our Savior took the most profound truths and put them in pictures that any child could see. None is more profoundly simple than the picture he gives us of himself as the way, the only way of salvation in John 10:1-10. In these verses our Savior declares that the only way we can enter into heaven is by the door. Then, he says twice, — “*I Am the Door*.”

Christ is the Door, the only door, by which we can and must enter the kingdom of God. Of all the comparisons made use of by our Lord Jesus to illustrate and set forth what he is appointed of God to be to his people, none is more simple, and yet none more profound, than this, — “*I am the Door*.”

How merciful, how gracious, how kind! Our Savior compares himself to a door, so that every time we enter or leave any building or room we may be reminded of him. Everyone knows what a door is and how it is used. A door lets people in who want in, and shuts people out you want to keep out. And a door lets people out who want out, and shuts people in you want to keep in. Our Savior says, in verse 9 — “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*.”

“In” and “Out”

It is easy enough to understand what he means by the words, — “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in*.” But what does he mean by the last part of that sentence? — “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*.” If we enter into the kingdom of God, if we enter into salvation by Christ the Door, we must and shall go out of something else, and going out of that into the sheepfold of grace, we find pasture for our souls.

The Door Out

Christ Jesus is the only door out of death and into life. He is the Door, the only door out of our house of bondage. There are many houses of bondage in this world, from which there is no way out but Christ. We are all by nature condemned prisoners, shut up under the lock and key of God's holy law (Galatians 3:22). We are guilty, without excuse, debtors, criminals, under the wrath of God, condemned by conscience, condemned by the words of our own mouths, and condemned by God's holy law. There is a worse prison to come, but this is the way to it, the beginning of sorrows. Is there no door out of this prison, no way to pay the debt, no way to make satisfaction to divine justice, that we may be discharged from this prison? Bless God, there is, and Christ is that Door; whosoever believes in him, shall not come into condemnation (Romans 8:1; Isaiah 61:1).

The Lord Jesus has set many captives free (Psalm 116:16; 1 Tim. 1:13-15). As he sent his angel to set Peter and John free from prison, he sends his servants preaching the gospel, to proclaim the opening of the prison, to proclaim liberty to all who believe, to all who will go out by him (Righteously earned liberty! — Blood bought liberty! — Liberty by the cancellation of debt! — Liberty by the power of his Spirit!).

As Israel came out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, by the blood of the lamb and by the power of God, passing through the Red Sea, so Christ is the Door out of our house of slavery, darkness, and bondage.

As we are all condemned prisoners by nature, we are all by nature bondmen to the law. Condemnation we fear and despise; but this bondage we love. It is the bondage of legalism, the bondage of self-righteous, works religion. Oh, how men love the shackles of duty, the leg irons of ceremony, the stocks of piety, and the prison of legality! Serving the law, we were the servants of sin; and we loved that slavery.

The Lord Jesus is the Door, the only Door out of legal bondage (Matthew 11:28-29). He is the Door out of Babylon. — *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36). Yet there are many who not only will not be free themselves, but are enraged at those who are. As Ishmael the son of the bond-woman hated and persecuted Isaac the son of the free-woman, religious legalists hate and constantly oppose those who walk at liberty. Still, Christ is the Door of liberty and freedom from cruel, legal religion.

Who among the saints in the household of faith has never been in the bondage of affliction? Some of you endured great afflictions. I know many who seem to spend much of their lives in trouble and sorrow, in days of woe and nights of weeping, ever struggling with sickness and pain, domestic trouble and financial crises one after another. God's saints, as long as we live in this world, are engaged in warfare in themselves, warfare between the flesh and the spirit.

Spiritual trouble shall not cease until we cease to live in this body of sin and death. — *“Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”* (Philippians 1:29). And Christ is the Door, the only Door out of our trouble. There is no other (1 Peter 5:6-7; Psalms 27:8-10; 73:21-28). — *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

Soon you and I must take our place in the grave, where our bodies will rest, and rest in hope, because Christ is the Door, the only door, by which we shall escape that prison (John 11:25; Revelation 20:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Christ is the Door out of condemnation, bondage, legalism, trouble and the grave!

The Door In

As Christ is the Door out of bondage, so our Lord Jesus Christ is the Door, the only door into the sheepfold. When our Savior says, *“I am the Door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture,”* he is talking about entering into the kingdom of God, the sheepfold of grace.

There are many who enter into the kingdom outwardly, by climbing up some other way into the church of God, refusing to trust Christ. But those who enter in by Christ the Door, believing on him, shall be saved. Being saved, they go out of the house of bondage, and walk at liberty. Christ is the way in. He says, *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”* He is the Door; and the Door is open. All who enter in by the Door are welcome.

Christ is the Door, the only door by which sinners may come in unto God himself (Ephesians 2:13, 18; 3:12; Hebrews 10:19-22). Our Savior died that he might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). He alone is the Door of atonement and reconciliation (Romans 4:25-5:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The Lord Jesus Christ is both the Ark of Salvation and the Door into the Ark. The Son of God is both the Treasury of all good things and the Door into the Treasury. All the fulness of God is in Christ. All the fulness of grace is in Christ. All the fulness of glory is in Christ. All the promises of God are in Christ. All things are his and he is ours! All fulness is in Christ!

Twofold Promise

In John 10:9 the Lord Jesus makes a twofold promise to all who enter in by the door. He said, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* In John 10:9 he says, *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*

Here is the first part of the promise: — *“They shall be saved.”* Christ pledges his word for it that those who enter in shall be saved. Those who do not enter in shall be damned. If you are not in Christ, you are without; and *“without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”* (Revelation 22:15). But those who enter in *“shall be saved.”* — Immediately saved! — Fully pardoned! — Completely justified! — Saved from all the evil consequences of sin! — Eternally saved!

Here is the second part of the promise: — *“and find pasture.”* Come to Christ and find in him pasture for your soul. What luscious pasture there is for his sheep in his gospel! What great pasture we find for our souls in the ordinances of divine worship!

Any Man

“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” — The Word of God makes many sweet promises of grace to sinners. But none is sweeter than this: — *“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”* Our Lord called the thirsty in Isaiah. — *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters”* (Isaiah 55:1). In John 7:37 he said, on the last day, that great day of the feast, *“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink”* (John 7:37). Near the end of the Book of Revelation he says, *“I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”* (21:6). In Matthew’s gospel he addresses those who labor and are heavy laden. — *“Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (11:28). In Zechariah he calls prisoners of hope. — *“Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope”* (9:12). But here he says, *“If any man.”* That is peculiarly precious. It is not said if any thirsty man, if any weary man, if any laboring man, if any heavy laden man, but *“if any man enter in he shall be saved.”* That means any man: rich or poor, old or young, male or female, high or low, you or me. — *“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”*

Shuts In

Christ is the Door that shuts us in. When Noah entered into the ark, the Lord shut him in; and once we have entered into the Ark of God, Christ is the Door that shuts us in (John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5).

“Jesus is our God and Savior,
Guide, and Counselor, and Friend:
He will never, never leave us,
Nor will let us quite leave Him.”

“The work which God’s goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is yea and amen,
And never was forfeited yet.

Things future, nor things that are now,
Not all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands,
Eternity will not erase:
Impressed on His heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.

Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the Earnest is given,
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven!”

Christ Our Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 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. 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.”

(John 10:11-16)

What a blessed, delightful, instructive subject we have before us! May God the Holy Spirit now take the things of Christ as our Shepherd and show them to us. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Shepherd of his sheep. The Apostle Peter describes our experience of grace in these words, — “*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*” (1 Peter 2:25).

Old Testament

Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, it was prophesied that Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, our Redeemer would come into the world as a Man, and that one chief characteristic of his work of redemption and grace would be that of a shepherd buying, seeking, and gathering his sheep. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young*” (Isaiah 40:11). — “*They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them*” (Isaiah 49:10).

The Lord himself says in the Book of Ezekiel, “*For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out*” (Ezekiel 34:11). — “*Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd*” (Ezekiel 34:22-23). — “*And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them*” (Ezekiel 37:24).

When David meditated upon these things, his heart bubbled over with joy, confidence, faith, and hope. He sang, “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*” (Psalms 23:1).

New Testament

In the New Testament three distinct adjectives are used to set forth the characteristics of Christ as our Shepherd. In his great work of redemption our Savior is called “*The Good Shepherd*.” He says, “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*” (John 10:11). In his resurrection glory he is called “*The Great Shepherd*.” The apostle Paul closes the Book of Hebrews describing our Redeemer as “*The Great Shepherd of the Sheep*” (Hebrews 13:20). In reference to his glorious return Peter declares him to be “*The Chief Shepherd*” (1 Peter 5:4).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd with reference to his work of redemption, the great Shepherd with reference to his resurrection, and the chief Shepherd with reference to his glorious return. These three adjectives are always distinct. They are never mingled together or interchanged. Each is used in its proper place and setting with reference to the Son of God, and the accomplishment of his mediatorial work for the salvation of his sheep.

The Good Shepherd

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls himself *“The Good Shepherd.”* — *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”* — *“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine”* (John 10:11, 14). In the redemption and salvation of our souls the Lord Jesus Christ is *“The Good Shepherd.”* The Apostle Peter takes up this theme of redemption in 1 Peter 2:21-25, and shows us five things about Christ as *“The Good Shepherd.”* Remember, it is with reference to the redemption and salvation of our souls that Christ is called *“The Good Shepherd.”*

1. The Good Shepherd is the suffering Shepherd.

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Here is our calling. — *“For even hereunto were ye called.”* All true believers have been effectually and irresistibly called by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit to Christ. We have been called to salvation, eternal life, and faith in him. And all who are called by grace are called to a life that involves suffering in this world (Philippians 1:29).

In this world we are called to suffer many things for Christ’s sake, even as he suffered many things for our sakes. As he took up his cross and suffered for us, so we must willingly take up our cross daily and follow him. It is written, *“If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.”* It is not possible to follow Christ without suffering with him and for him.

“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16). — Let us ever remember that those things we suffer as Christians, as believers, we suffer from Christ, with Christ, and for Christ. This is a great honor indeed. So let us glorify God in all that we may be called to suffer in this world as the children of God.

Here is our rule of life. — *“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”* Rebels must be ruled by law. Mercenaries are ruled by rewards. Believers are ruled by Christ. We do not live by the rule of religious custom and tradition, the rule of our own consciences, or even the rule of Mosaic law. We follow Christ. We live by the rule of his Word, his example, and his Spirit.

But the primary thing to be seen in this verse is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ, our good Shepherd, is the suffering Shepherd. — *“Because Christ also suffered for us.”* Apart from the sufferings of Christ for us, apart from him having fully suffered the wrath of God to the full satisfaction of divine justice, there could be no salvation for anyone. Be sure you understand this. The necessity for Christ’s death was the holiness and justice of Almighty God (Romans 3:24-26). Had Christ not died in our stead, we could never have been made alive (John 12:24). Had Christ not suffered the curse of the law for us, we could never have been freed from that curse (Galatians 3:13). Had the Son of God not poured out his life’s blood unto death upon the cursed tree, he could never have obtained eternal redemption for us. It was with *“his own blood (that) he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Hebrews 9:12). Had not the good Shepherd suffered for us, he could never have saved us (1 Peter 3:18). But, since he has suffered the wrath of God in our stead to the full satisfaction of infinite justice, all for whom he suffered and died must and shall be saved. Else his suffering and death are vain; and the blood of Christ is of non-effect!

2. Next, the Good Shepherd is described as the sinless Shepherd.

“He knew no sin.” He is *“holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”* He *“did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”* (1 Peter 2:22). Had he not been the sinless Shepherd, he could not have been the good Shepherd. Had he not been altogether without sin, he could not have atoned for our sins; he could not have been

our Substitute. But since he is without sin, the Lord Jesus Christ is a suitable substitute for sinners, one who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him.

Though he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, “*he did no sin.*” Though he lived among sinful men, there was never any “*guile found in his mouth.*” Our Savior had no sin: no original sin, no personal sin, no actual sin. Yet, this immaculately holy, sinless One was made sin for us; and now we are made to be the righteousness of God in him. He took our place in time that we might take his place for eternity (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

3. Next, Peter tells us that the Good Shepherd is the submissive Shepherd.

“*Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*” (1 Peter 2:23). — There is, of course, no subordination within the triune Godhead. The three Persons of the Holy trinity are eternally and immutably equal in all things. But, in order to redeem and save his sheep, the Son of God agreed to become one of us. He willingly, voluntarily assumed all responsibility for his sheep. And in his office capacity as our Mediator, he submitted himself to the will of the triune God as our Shepherd. That is what is revealed in John 10:16-18.

He submitted himself to the will of God in the covenant of grace before the foundation of the world, and voluntarily became Jehovah’s Servant (Exodus 21:5-6; Psalms 40:6-8; Isaiah 50:5-7). The Lord Jesus voluntarily submitted himself to the will of God at the time of his incarnation (Hebrews 10:5-10). Our great Savior, as our Representative in this world, voluntarily submitted himself to the will of God as a Man throughout the days of his life upon this earth. Both his first words and his last words in this world demonstrate his submission to the Father’s will (Luke 2:49; John 12:27-28; 19:30). His life might well be summarized in his own words as he knelt in dark Gethsemane, — “*Not my will, thy will be done.*” Our Lord Jesus Christ was a willing Victim, a voluntary Substitute, an unconstrained, unforced Sacrifice for sinners.

4. Now look at verse twenty-four. Peter tells us that the Good Shepherd is the substitutionary Shepherd.

“*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed*” (1 Peter 2:24; John 10:11, 14, 15). Substitution is the very heart of the gospel. That person who does not understand the doctrine of substitution has not yet even learned the ABCs of Christianity. This is basic, fundamental, and essential (Isaiah 53:4-6, 9-11). The Lord Jesus Christ is an able Substitute, a willing Substitute, a legal Substitute, a satisfactory Substitute, and an effectual Substitute, because he is our real Substitute. He did not pretend to take our place and take our sins, and take our guilt, and take our punishment. He really took all because he is a real Substitute.

Yes, the Word of God does, most distinctly, teach the great and glorious doctrine of limited atonement. You simply cannot believe in substitutionary atonement without believing in limited atonement. The Son of God did not die for nothing. Christ did not shed his blood in vain! The scope, the object, the purpose, the goal, the benefits of Christ’s atonement are limited to, specifically designed for, and shall be enjoyed by God’s elect. His precious blood made definite satisfaction and complete atonement for the sins of his people. Christ died for those who are saved by his blood. The Good Shepherd did not lay down his life for the goats. Where does the Word of God suggest such an absurdity? Nonsense! The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. That is not Baptist language, or Calvinistic language. That is Bible language! Is it not? Read John 10:11 and 15, and John 10:26 and 27.

There can be no compromise here. This is the place where the glory of God and the souls of men are at stake.

- Those who preach a universal atonement preach a false gospel, for they preach that the will of man is the effectual cause of salvation and redemption. Whereas the Word of God declares, “*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” (John 1:12-13). “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Romans 9:16).

- Those who preach a universal atonement preach a false Christ; for they make the Son of God a failure in that which is declared to be his most glorious work, declaring that his blood was shed in vain for the multitudes in hell. Whereas the Word of God asserts that “*He shall not fail!*” (Isaiah 42:4).
- Those who preach a universal atonement preach a false god, for they declare that the love of God is mutable, the justice of God perverted, the purpose of God frustrated, and the Word of God is a lie, when they assert that the sin debt fully paid by Christ may yet be demanded from those for whom it has already been paid! Whereas God declares himself to be “*A just God and a Savior!*” (Isaiah 45:20). Because God is just and cannot be unjust, we are assured that...

“Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine!”

- Those who preach a universal atonement preach a false spirit, for they declare that the Spirit of God convinces men of a lie when he convinces them of sin removed, righteousness established, and judgment finished. Whereas the Son of God asserts that these things are indeed done (John 16:8-13).

We cannot and must not tolerate such blasphemous perversions. I dare not hold my tongue, or guard my pen, while wolves in sheep’s clothing seek to destroy the souls of men, and rob Christ of his glory as the Good Shepherd! Look once more at Peter’s description of the Good Shepherd. He is the suffering Shepherd, the sinless Shepherd, the submissive Shepherd, and the substitutionary Shepherd. Then, in verse twenty-five the Apostle tells us that...

5. The Good Shepherd is the successful Shepherd.

“*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*” (1 Peter 2:25). — It is our nature to stray. We are all depraved, sinful, straying creatures. We went astray in our father Adam. We went astray as soon as we were born, speaking lies. And we went astray by deliberate choice all the days of our lives. Poor, ignorant, lost sheep can never find their way home. Dogs can. Cats can. Horses can. Even goats and hogs can. But sheep simply do not have the ability to come home. Straying sheep can only stray. They are the dumbest, most helpless, most pitiful animals on earth.

You will notice that the Spirit of God does not say, “You have returned,” as if to imply that we decided by our own freewill to return to Christ. Oh, no! That would never happen! Dumb as we are, sheep know better than that! The text says, you “*are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*” We “*are returned,*” because the good Shepherd sought us out and returned us! We went astray. He sought us out. We were lost. He found us. We were sliding into hell. He laid us on his shoulders. We would not and could not return to him. He returned us to himself. He who is the good Shepherd is the successful Shepherd. “*He shall save his people from their sins.*” With reference to his great work of redeeming and saving his people, Christ is “*The Good Shepherd.*”

The Great Shepherd

Now, let’s look at Hebrews 13:20. Here the Holy Spirit shows us that with reference to his resurrection glory, our Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Notice how the Holy Spirit describes the God of glory. Though he is glorious in holiness, inflexible in justice, majestic in power, and terrible in wrath, the great and glorious Lord God is called “*the God of peace!*” He is called “*the God of peace,*” because He is the Author of peace. He found the way of peace and devised the covenant of peace. He made peace. By the blood atonement of his dear Son, the Lord God is reconciled, propitiated, and satisfied. And he is the Giver of peace.

The resurrected, ascended, exalted Christ is called “*the Great Shepherd of the sheep.*” He was the Good Shepherd in his humiliation, while he worked out and accomplished redemption for us. And he may yet be called “*the Good Shepherd,*” as he seeks and saves his lost sheep by his almighty grace. But we are no longer dealing with him in his humiliation. Here is the Shepherd who sits upon the throne of the universe. He is “*the Great Shepherd of the sheep.*” He is great in his person. — The God-Man! He is great in his position. — The Right Hand of the Majesty on High! He is great in his power. — Total Sovereignty! — Absolute Omnipotence! He is great in his possessions. — All Fullness! And he is great in his provisions. — All Grace! — All Glory! — All Things!

Our Lord Jesus obtained his greatness as our Shepherd in his resurrection glory “*through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*” We read about that covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The blood of the covenant is the precious, sin-atonement blood of the Son of God, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. But why is the resurrection of Christ connected with the blood of the everlasting covenant? The whole purpose of God in the everlasting covenant was contingent upon one thing. It all depended upon one ultimate, final, climatic thing. It all depended upon the sufficiency, efficacy, and satisfaction of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12-17). When our Lord Jesus Christ cried from the cross, “*It is finished,*” and died, he had at last fulfilled all the terms and conditions of the covenant. He rendered unto God the Father complete satisfaction for the sins of his people. And the efficacy of his atonement demanded both his resurrection from the dead, and ours. It demanded both his release from all the consequences of sin, and ours. This was the Father’s promise to the Son as our Surety in the covenant before the world began (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Our sins were made to be his, and were thus imputed to our blessed Christ. His death satisfied the justice of God for all the sins of his people, which he bore in his own body on the tree. Now death has no more dominion over him. And, because he is our Substitute, death has no more dominion over us (1 Peter 4:1-2).

It is through this Great Shepherd of the sheep that God perfects his work of grace in his sheep. In Hebrews 13:21, Paul’s prayer is that the God of peace may “*Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*” — It is Christ the Great Shepherd who causes his sheep to do his will. It is Christ the Great Shepherd who works in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight. And it is Christ the Great Shepherd who shall have the glory and praise for all his works of grace for us and in us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is “*the Good Shepherd*” in his work of redemption and salvation. He is “*the Great Shepherd*” in his resurrection glory.

The Chief Shepherd

The Apostle Peter declares our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Chief Shepherd in his glorious second advent. — “*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*” (1 Peter 5:4). Christ is the Chief Shepherd. In the kingdom of God there is only one Chief. That Chief is the Lord Jesus

Christ himself. All pastors, teachers, elders, evangelists, missionaries, apostles, and prophets are servants of the Shepherd, not lords over the flock. God's servants are examples to the flock, not tyrants over the flock. We are under-shepherds. Christ alone is the Chief Shepherd. And it is as the Chief Shepherd that our Lord Jesus Christ shall complete his work of grace in our ultimate and final glorification. Soon, Christ the Chief Shepherd shall appear. When Christ comes, he will raise our bodies up from the dead. And the Chief Shepherd shall give to all his sheep "*a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*" We shall at last be perfectly conformed to Christ, even to the likeness of his glory as the God-Man Mediator. Then, the purpose of our God shall be finished (Romans 8:28-29; 1 John 3:1-3).

Try to remember these three pictures of Christ our Shepherd. Meditate upon them, draw comfort from them, and glorify Christ in your heart as — the Good Shepherd who redeemed us, — the Great Shepherd who rules from heaven for us, — and the Chief Shepherd who is coming again to take us up unto himself in glory. It is Christ the Shepherd who is our Savior. Salvation is altogether his work. He agreed to it in the covenant. He accomplished it on the cross. He applies it from his throne. He planned it. He purchased it. He performs it. He preserves it. He perfects it. And he alone shall have the praise for it.

The Free Obedience of Christ

“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. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” (John 10:16-18)

Isaiah 53:10-12 describes the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as that which God the Father did to his Son when he made him to be sin for us.

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 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: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Isaiah 50:5-7 describes our Lord’s sacrificial obedience unto death, even the death of the cross as our voluntary Surety and Substitute. Like all the law of God given to Israel, the law regarding the bond slave in Exodus 21:1-6 was a messianic, prophetic law. It portrayed the work of our Lord Jesus Christ as Jehovah’s righteous Servant. In the covenant of grace, before the worlds were made, the Son of God, our Savior, became Jehovah’s voluntary Servant that he might redeem and save his people by his free obedience to God as our Substitute. This is what Isaiah describes in Isaiah 50:5-7.

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

Here in the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep. Let me never tire of reading, hearing, and meditating upon those blessed words of his: — “*I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*” (v. 11). — “*I lay down my life for the sheep*” (v. 15). Then, in verse 16, our Savior declares, — “*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.*”

Then, in verses 17 and 18, he tells us that he must bring all his sheep into his fold by laying down his life for the sheep in his own obedience to the Father as “*the Shepherd of the sheep.*” Oh, what a shepherd he is, who dies that the sheep may live! In these two magnificent verses of Holy Scripture, our Lord Jesus Christ describes his own death, the death he must accomplish at Jerusalem, as an act of voluntary, free obedience to his Father.

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

In these verses we have a description of our Lord’s sacrificial obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, as our voluntary Surety and Substitute.

A Question

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most wonderful, astounding, magnificent event in the history of the universe. Nothing that is, has been, or shall hereafter be, can be compared to it. Yet, as he was suffering the wrath of God, bearing the sins of his people, dying as the voluntary Substitute for guilty, hell-deserving, hell-bent sinners, such as we are, we hear the Son of God expressing the most woeful, unexplainable lamentation imaginable. *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger"* (Lamentations 1:12).

When I hear those words falling from the lips of the Son of God as he hangs upon the cursed tree, I simply cannot avoid asking, "Of whom does the bleeding Lamb of God speak these words? To whom is the death of Christ meaningless and insignificant?"

Nothing in all the universe is more wonderful and magnificent in the eyes of God than the death of his dear Son. The Savior himself declares, *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life!"* The angels of heaven, like the cherubs facing the mercy-seat, ever look into the mystery and wonder of redemption, by the blood of Christ, with astonishment. God's servants, faithful gospel preachers, are so overwhelmed with the wonders of redemption and the glory of the Redeemer that they never cease to study, glory in, and preach the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 6:1-6; Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 2:2). Redeemed sinners on the earth cherish nothing, delight in nothing, marvel at nothing like we do the death of our Lord Jesus Christ for us (Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16; 4:10). The ransomed in glory appear to think of nothing and speak of nothing except the dying love of the Lamb in the midst of the throne (Revelation 5:9-12). Hell itself looks upon the death of Christ as a wonderful, unexplainable, mysterious thing. I am certain that this is one thing that Satan himself did not understand - That Christ would triumph over him, and crush his head by his death upon the cross. Else he would never have put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Master.

Yet, astonishing as it is to imagine, there are some to whom our darling Savior speaks, as it were with astonishment, to whom his death is meaningless, insignificant, nothing. Who are these people to whom the death of Christ is nothing? Who is it that thinks little of the sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Our Lord is here addressing himself to everyone who passes by him, passes by his sacrifice, passes by his death as the sinners' Substitute. O unbelieving, Christless soul, it is you! O cold, calculating, heartless preacher, you who pass by the crucified Christ, and take to your lips meaningless, insignificant things (politics, social issues, denominational squabbles, religious history, traditions, etc.), it is you! Christ crucified is mundane, meaningless, and insignificant only to unregenerate, unbelieving souls.

It is my heart's prayer that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ will be made the most important thing in all the world to you who read these lines. I pray that you and I may become totally consumed with the crucified Christ, that our hearts, our lives, every fiber of our souls may be constantly dominated by the death of Christ as our sin-atonement Savior.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is written, *"grace is poured into thy lips,"* declares plainly that his death at Calvary was the free, voluntary act of his own obedience to his Father's will, by which he won his Father's love as a man, as our Mediator and Surety. *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."* (John 10:17-18).

The Father's Commandment

In John 10, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of himself not as God the eternal Son, but as the Good Shepherd, the Mediator, the Surety of his people. He says, *"This commandment have I received of my Father."* With those

words, he declares that his death as our Substitute was arranged by God before the world began (Psalm 40:7; Hebrews 10:7-10). The death of Christ was not accomplished by the arrangement of men or by the arrangement of hell, but by the arrangement of the Triune God (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The death of Christ at Calvary was accomplished by the arrangement of infinite love, through an eternal covenant, by the work of Divine providence (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8; Hebrews 10:5-14).

The Son's Obedience

The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life voluntarily, as an act of free obedience to his Father. No man forced him to die. God the Father did not compel him to die, or take his life from him. Oh, No! Our Savior died voluntarily, by his own will. His death was accomplished by his own will. *"He poured out his soul unto death."* It is true, as we have seen, *"it pleased the Father to bruise him."* The Father cried, *"Awake, O sword, against One that is my fellow. Smite the Shepherd."* But our blessed Lord Jesus, our precious Christ, took the cup of wrath in his own hands. The Son of God fell willingly upon the sword of justice. Our Savior died by his own will. The Lord Jesus laid down his life for the satisfaction of justice. Our Savior laid down his life as the Substitute for chosen sinners. The Son of God laid down his life for the glory of his Father. Our blessed Redeemer laid down his life, because of his love for us. The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life that he might take it again (Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:5-11).

The Father's Love for the Son

Our Savior says, *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life."* I know of nothing in heaven or earth so sweet to meditate upon and so impossible to explain as the Father's love for his darling, dying Son. The Father loved him for the loveliness of his Godhead. The Father loved him for the beauty of his holy humanity. The Father loved him, because he laid down his life for us. The Father loved him as the glorious, saving, effectual Mediator of his people.

God himself never saw anything in all the world so lovely, so infinitely worthy of his love, admiration, and honor as the death of his dear Son upon the cursed tree for his people. *"Herein is love!"* Because of this great act of love, because of this great act of Christ's free obedience to the Father as our Surety, the Father has given his Son everything (Isaiah 53:4-12; John 3:35; 17:2).

Let us learn from the words and example of our Lord and Savior, that though God's child may suffer greatly in this world, may often have to carry a heavy cross, and may often have the Father's face hidden from him, yet he is the darling object of his Father's love. Never did the Father more fully love his Son than when he was heaping upon him the fury of his wrath.

God honors those who honor his Son. The only way a sinner can honor the Son of God is to trust him. The only way of access to God is Christ. Our only worthiness of the Father's love and approval is Christ (John 17:22-26). Yet, in Christ, because of Christ, for Christ's sake, God loves us. God the Father gave his Son to die for us. God the Son laid down his life for us. God the Spirit now sprinkles us with the blood of Christ, and declares us, "Redeemed." *"Ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Four Lessons

There are several practical lessons to be drawn from our Savior's obedience for every child of God in this world.

1. Though God's child may suffer greatly in this world, often carrying a heavy cross, and having the Father's face hidden from him, yet he is the darling object of his Father's love. Never did the Father more fully love his Son than when he was heaping upon him the fury of his wrath!
2. God honors those who honor his Son. The only way a sinner can honor the Son of God is to trust him. God honors those who trust his Son.
3. The only way of access to the holy Lord God is Christ. Our only worthiness of the Father's love and approval and acceptance is Christ (John 17:22-26).
4. God loves his people. Oh, how God must love us! The Father gave his Son to die for us! The Son laid down his life for us. The Spirit now sprinkles us with the blood of Christ and declares us, "Redeemed!"

Believer, gaze steadfastly upon your crucified Redeemer, and realize that *"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Hirelings and the Shepherd

“This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 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. 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. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” (John 10:6-21)

George Whitefield once declared, “As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world, is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskilled guides. And yet, in all ages, we find that there have been many wolves in sheep’s clothing, many that daubed with untempered mortar, that prophesied smoother things than God did allow.”

Wolves in sheep’s clothing were prevalent in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. They were common in the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. They were found in the earliest churches in the days of the apostles. And they are common today. In fact, throughout history, the wolves have always been the majority, the accepted, praised, applauded, and exalted leaders of the religious world; and faithful gospel preachers have always been, and are today, held in contempt, despised, mocked, ridiculed, slandered, and opposed as wolves.

God’s servants are shepherds, pastors after God’s own heart, given by him to his church for the care of their souls, to feed them with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15). Blessed are those people and churches to whom God gives faithful pastors. All false prophets are hirelings. Cursed are they who have for pastors hirelings and false prophets.

In the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel, our Lord Jesus spoke pointedly to the religious leaders of his day and identified them as hireling shepherds. Remember, this parable was spoken to those Scribes and Pharisees who had just put a man out of the synagogue because he had been healed by the Master. They sat in Moses’ seat and assumed the office of shepherds, teaching the sheep the things of God, but without the knowledge of God and without the authority of God. They fed themselves, not the sheep. The Lord Jesus calls them hirelings, thieves, and robbers.

In this parable the Sheepfold (v.1) is the Church of God. The Door into the Church and Kingdom of God is Christ, his blood and righteousness (vv. 1, 7, 9). The True Shepherd is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. He gave his life for the sheep. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out of the wilderness into Canaan, out of darkness into light, out of Babylon into the sheepfold. The Porter who opens the way for Christ and causes the sheep to hear his voice and follow him is God the Holy Spirit. The Sheep are God’s elect.

Some are in the fold. Some are yet straying from the Good Shepherd and his fold. But all God's elect are Christ's sheep.

“This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (vv. 6-10)

With those words, our Savior shows a clear distinction between all false shepherds and all true shepherds, using himself as the standard and example of the true shepherd. He continues the same analogy in the following verses, and declares that the one great distinction between hirelings and true shepherds is just this: — The hireling cares not for the sheep, because he is just a hireling.

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 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” (vv. 11-15).

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” — What blessed words! As you read through the Scriptures, it would be both instructive and delightful to mark the many names by which our Savior describes himself in this blessed Book. There are more than a hundred of them; I think 107. There is a good reason why he has so many names. — Our all-glorious Christ has so many offices that one name could not represent or explain them all. Indeed, all of them put together do not describe him. Paul said, — *“Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I might preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

Of all the names given, that of a shepherd is, perhaps, the sweetest. Our Savior was a master Artist. He drew pictures with words that explain things more clearly than volumes of defining words. As this chapter opens, he contrasts himself with a stranger. Here (vv. 11-15), he contrasts himself with an hireling, whose own the sheep are not. Let's look at the passage, marking the contrast between the hireling and true pastors, true shepherds.

A hireling is “a person who works only for pay, with little or no concern for the value of the work.” A shepherd is “a person who tends sheep, a protector, a guardian, a defender, a keeper, one who watches over, provides for, feeds, and carefully guards a flock.”

Here is a hireling.

Our Savior uses the word “*hireling*” to describe all self-serving preachers, pastors, and religious leaders, those men who claim to be God's servants but refuse to enter the sheepfold by the Door, those who climb up some other way. — The hireling, the false Shepherd, will not submit himself to the righteousness of God, will not enter by the Door, will not trust Christ alone for righteousness.

The Master tells us plainly that all who climb up some other way are thieves and robbers (v. 1). They come only “*to kill, and to steal, and to destroy*” (v. 10). Here are the common features of a hireling preacher.

“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep” (vv. 12-13)

He who is a hireling is one who only seeks his hire. He is only interested in himself. The Word of God plainly teaches that every faithful gospel preacher is to be maintained by the generosity of God’s people. The fact that a man is supported by the people he serves does not make him a hireling. — *“The laborer is worthy of his hire”* (Luke 10:7). In fact, a man may be a hireling who receives no financial remuneration from any church. A hireling is a man who is motivated by his own lusts. A true shepherd is motivated by his Master. Sheep control hirelings. True shepherds cannot be controlled by sheep. Yet, the faithful shepherd is to be maintained by the flock he serves. The Scriptures are crystal clear about this (1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

The church of God is not a business; and faithful men cannot be hired. Money talks everywhere in the world. And money talks in religious organizations. But money has no voice in God’s church. And money has no voice with God’s servants. But every faithful pastor is to be supported and maintained in his livelihood by the generosity of God’s people.

The hireling is one who seeks the hire and not the flock. This was the most common charge God laid against false prophets in the Old Testament. Isaiah complained of it in his day. — *“His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs; they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter”* (Isaiah 56:10, 11). Jeremiah said the same thing in his day. — *“For, from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet, even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely”* (Jeremiah 6:13). Ezekiel spoke of the false prophets in exactly the same way, describing the hireling shepherd as one who feeds himself. — *“Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”* (Ezekiel 34:2). Paul said exactly the same thing about false prophets in his day. — *“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s”* (Philippians 2:21).

This is the black mark of the hireling. — *“He that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth.”* But it is not merely the seeking of money that marks the hireling. It is seeking things for himself. — Ease — Honor — Fame — Position — Power — Influence.

The hireling is one *“whose own the sheep are not.”* — He has no love for the sheep. The hireling is not part of the family. The hireling is not a son, or a brother, or a father. He has no connection with the sheep. He has no connection with the souls of men. He is one of the “clergy,” a “reverend.” They are just “lay people,” “sheep.”

“The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.” — That is another feature of a hireling. I do not suggest or imply that any man who moves from one congregation to another is a hireling. That is not the case. God may move a man from one place of service to another. But I do mean to say, and our Lord means for us to understand, that the hireling always watches out for number one. He always takes care of himself. If a wolf roars, the hireling flees, because he is a hireling. The hireling is always found on the side of the wolf!

He is not willing to bear any reproach or persecution for Christ and the gospel. He is not a keeper of the flock, like David who went after the lion and the bear. When they rose up against the sheep, David did not flee, but caught them by the beard and slew them. He is not a keeper of the sheep like the Apostle Paul, who fought

with wild beasts at Ephesus, who turned his back on none, who gave place to none, no, not for an hour, that truth might continue.

When the wolf comes (Satan, trouble, persecution, opposition, slander, reproach), the hireling flees, the sheep are scattered, the name of God, his church, and the gospel of the grace of God are dishonored. But the hireling protects himself and gets “a call from the Lord,” telling him that “his work in that place is done,” and moves on to greener pastures.

The hireling is one who flees when the sheep are most in need of a shepherd, because “*He careth not for the sheep*” (vv. 12-13). His only interest is himself, his name, his reputation, his future. He does not care for the sheep. He does not care what becomes of the sheep. They are just so many pebbles in his road to success.

John Calvin wrote, “He who looks to the hire, and not to the flock, though he may deceive others, when the Church is in a state of tranquility, yet when he comes into the contest, will give proof of his treachery.” — “*Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened*” (Zechariah 11:17).

Here is the true shepherd.

All that is here said of the hireling, as it identifies the hireling, by contrast identifies the true shepherd, the faithful gospel preacher. — The hireling serves himself; but the faithful shepherd serves the sheep (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:1-7).

The hireling has no personal interest in the sheep. They are not his. The true shepherd has a very personal interest in the sheep. They are his. God’s family is his family. God’s people are his people. Christ’s sheep are his sheep. Faithful pastors stand in a peculiar relation to the Lord’s sheep. Faithful shepherds are called fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19; 1 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 10). Like fathers, they are instruments of birth. Like fathers, they provide for the family. Like fathers, they educate the family. Like fathers, they lead the family. Like fathers, they protect the family. Like fathers, they are devoted to the family.

True shepherds, true pastors are set as watchmen who stand on the watch tower. They watch over the souls committed to their trust as they that must give account (Hebrews 13:7, 17). The relationship of faithful gospel preachers and the people they serve is a relationship that outlasts death (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1; Colossians 1:25-29). God’s servants are men to whom the Lord Jesus has entrusted the care of his sheep; and they care for the sheep (Acts 20:31; Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 2:4; Philippians 1:3; 4:1; Colossians 2:1 1 Thessalonians 3:9).

This is the mark of a true shepherd. But a hireling cares not for the sheep; he does not and cannot weep for the sheep; he has no anguish of heart for them. He does not care what happens to them. When the wolf comes, the hireling flees, because “*he is a hireling and careth not for the sheep;*” but the faithful shepherd will not flee from the wolf, and will not abandon the sheep.

In the Word of God the wolf specifically represents both false prophets and heresy (Acts 20:29). The time when the wolf comes is the time to mark who the true shepherd is. He stands to protect the sheep when heresy comes in, or when a persecuting world stretches out its hand towards them. At such times, the true shepherd stands between the fold and trouble (Isaiah 52:7).

Here is the Good Shepherd.

“*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...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” (vv. 11, 14, 15). — The Good Shepherd gave his life for his sheep. The sentence was written against us, “*Thou shalt die.*” The Lord Jesus Christ stepped in and died for us. “*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:5). He did it out of free love, just because he loved us. — “*He gave himself for us.*” — “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3:16). When we enter into heaven’s glory, it will be altogether because of the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep. He knows his sheep with the eternal knowledge of everlasting love, delight, and approval. He knows his sheep as his sheep, sheep given to him by his Father, redeemed by his blood, and brought to him by his Spirit.

The Good Shepherd is known of his sheep, because he graciously makes himself known to them. We know his voice. We know who he is. We know what he has done. We know where he is. We know what he is doing. We know him!

The Good Shepherd seeks the sheep (vv. 16-18). Christ seeks his sheep, and all true shepherds, all true pastors seek the Lord’s sheep. Sheep are the business of Christ’s shepherds (pastors).

A Division

“There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” (vv. 19-21)

Here is a large crowd of religious people divided over doctrine. Religious people always are. What multitudes there are who defend, fight for, and divide family and friend over doctrine, even fussing about Christ, who never trust him! — The Lord Jesus was standing in their midst, teaching the gospel publicly, expounding the Old Testament Scriptures; but they believed not on him. They were divided over the Savior’s doctrine — “*for these sayings*” (v. 19). Some said he was a demon-possessed madman. Others objected. They would not go that far. But none believed (v. 25).

Do you trust the Son of God? Has the Lord Jesus Christ made himself known unto you? Has he given you an understanding to know him that is true? Are you in him that is true? This is the mark of all his sheep. “*I am known of mine.*” The sheep hear his voice. They follow him. They know him and know his voice. They will not follow a stranger.

If you now trust the Son of God, the Good Shepherd has brought you into his fold. The blessed Son of God has claimed you as his sheep, whom he redeemed, whom he has called, whom he will keep. Thus he fulfills his word by the prophet Jeremiah (3:15; 33:12-16).

Reprobation Asserted

“And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand. I and *my* Father are one.”
(John 10:19-30)

Reprobation is clearly taught in Holy Scripture. It is a doctrine which should fill our hearts with praise to God our Savior, the Triune Jehovah. Election is God’s choice of some to eternal salvation in Christ. Reprobation is God passing by, not choosing others. Predestination is God’s sovereign, eternal purpose of grace toward and for his elect. Reprobation is God leaving all others to themselves. Salvation is God’s mighty, wondrous works and operations of grace for, in, and upon his chosen. Reprobation is God abandoning others to themselves. Election is God loving Jacob and all the sons and daughters of Jacob. Reprobation is God hating Esau and all the children of Esau. Eternal life is God refusing to leave you alone. Reprobation is God leaving you alone. Salvation is God not leaving you to your will, your choice, and your way. Reprobation is God leaving you to your will, your choice, and your way.

Believe Not, Because

Read John 10:26. Here the Lord Jesus Christ asserts, with unmistakable clarity, the Bible doctrine of reprobation. — “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*” Read those words again. Be sure you read them just as they stand. Read nothing into the text. Leave nothing out of the text. Do not rearrange the words of the text. Read it just as it stands. Here is reprobation asserted, asserted by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinner’s Friend. — “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*”

What unspeakably solemn words those are! The Lord Jesus is the only man who ever lived who knew who the elect are and who the reprobate are. He alone knows who his sheep are and who the goats are. And here he asserts in the plainest terms possible that these Jews who caviled at his doctrine in rebellion and unbelief, these men who wilfully stopped their ears and would not hear him, these people who were offended at his doctrine were reprobates. Now that their character was fully manifested, the Lord did not hesitate to tell them that they were abandoned of God, left to themselves, reprobate. What an unspeakably solemn thing this is!

The force of our Lord’s words is definite and clear. Yet, preachers and theologians and commentators, in their unbelief, have done their best to cut these words out of the Bible altogether. Almost all the commentators explain away the meaning of our Lord’s words in John 10:26 by reversing their order. They rearrange the Master’s words to make them mean what they want them to mean. They read the text this way: — “*Because ye believe not, ye are not of my sheep.*” — But the text reads, “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*”

Men always turn the things of God upside down, especially lost religious men. When man comes to something in the Word of God he doesn’t like, something that doesn’t fit his religious system, something that is contrary to his high opinion of himself, instead of bowing to and receiving that which is written in the Book of God, he either ignores it, or rearranges it according to his own whims.

Here the Lord Jesus not only charges these very religious, very devoted Jews with unbelief, but he also tells them why faith had not been granted to them. — They were not of his sheep. They were not numbered among the favored people of God. They were not chosen of God. They were not among God's elect.

Faith in Christ does not make us his sheep. Rather faith in Christ is the evidence that we are his sheep (Hebrews 11:1). If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you believe because you were given to the Good Shepherd as one of his sheep before the world began. If you continue in willful, obstinate unbelief and perish in your sins, it is because God has left you to yourself, because God has abandoned you to your own will, your own choice, and your own way. You are reprobate.

John 8

“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.” — What does the Savior refer to in those words? When had he previously avowed that these people were not numbered among God's elect? When had he formerly declared them reprobates? Look at John 8. There he is talking to the very same people. In verse 48, they rejected his word, rejected his message, and declared him to be a worthless Samaritan, possessed of a devil. In verses 42-45 the Master tells us why they could not believe him.

“Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not” (John 8:42-45).

Again, in verse 47, the Lord Jesus told them that they believed not because they were not of his sheep. — *“He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”* They heard not because they were not of God. They believed not because they were not of his sheep. In each instance he gives this as the reason why they received him not: the solemn fact that they belonged not to God's elect. They were numbered not among God's elect, but among the reprobates. They were not sheep, but goats.

A Division

First, I want us to see the context in which our Savior's words are found (vv. 19-30). As I pointed out in the previous chapter, here is a large crowd of religious people divided over doctrine! Religious people always are. What multitudes there are who defend, fight for, and divide from family and friend over doctrine, even fussing about Christ, who never trusts him! The Lord Jesus was standing in their midst, teaching the gospel publicly, expounding the Old Testament Scriptures; but they believed not on him. They were divided over the Savior's doctrine — *“for these sayings”* (v. 19). He had plainly taught the sweet, gospel doctrines of sovereign election, covenant mercy, his own suretyship responsibility, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the holy trinity. Some said he was a demon-possessed madman. Others objected. They would not go that far. But none believed (vv. 25-26).

Let us never be surprised if we see the same thing in our own day. Human nature never changes. So long as the heart of man is without grace, so long we must expect it to be enmity against God, ever despising the gospel of Christ (Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

God's people and God's servants should never think it a strange thing if we go through the same experience as our Master. Our gospel is still the cause of offence and strife in our families and among our friends. If you believe and confess the gospel of God, you will endure ridicule, harsh words, and petty

persecution from this world. — *“If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?”* (Matthew 10:25)

Sheep

Take special notice of the name our Lord gives to his people. He uses a figurative expression full of deep meaning. He calls us, — *“My Sheep.”*

Without question, the word *“sheep”* points to something in the character and ways of God’s saints in this world. It speaks of the weakness, helplessness, harmless, and usefulness of his elect; all points of resemblance between the sheep and the believer. But the leading, primary thing intended by giving us the name *“sheep”* was to remind us of the entire dependence of the sheep upon its shepherd. Just as sheep hear the voice of their own shepherd, and follow him, so do believers follow Christ. By faith we listen to his call. By faith we submit to his guidance. By faith we lean on him, and commit our souls implicitly to his will and his direction. The ways of a shepherd and his sheep beautifully display the relation between Christ and the true Christian. We depend upon our dear Shepherd for everything in grace and in providence.

The expression, *“My Sheep,”* points to the close connection that exists between Christ and his people. We are his by gift from the Father, his by purchase, his by his calling and his choice, and his by the willing consent and submission of our own hearts. In the highest sense imaginable, we are Christ’s property. He made us for himself. He chose us to be his own. He bought us with his own precious blood. He sought us out, found us, and called us by his grace.

Privileges

Our dear Savior declares the vast privileges of mercy, love, and grace he has bestowed upon us as his sheep in verses 27-28.

Christ knows his sheep with a special knowledge of approbation, approval, and love. Christ gives his sheep *“eternal life.”* He has freely bestowed on us a right and title to heaven, pardoning our many sins, clothing us with his perfect righteousness, and making us new creatures by his grace. Money, and health, and worldly prosperity he often wisely withholds from his sheep. But he never fails to give them grace, and peace, and glory.

Christ declares that his sheep *“shall never perish.”* Weak as they are, they shall all be saved. Not one of them shall be lost or cast away. Not one of them shall miss heaven. We they err, they shall be corrected. When they stray, they shall be brought back. When they fall, they shall be raised up again. The enemies of our souls may be strong and mighty, but our Savior is mightier; and none shall pluck us out of our Savior’s hands.

Reprobation

Second, I want to show you the meaning of our Savior’s words in our text (v. 26). — *“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.”* In the next line he says, *“My sheep hear my voice!”* — *“And I know them!”* — *“And they follow me!”*

“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep!” — What do those words mean? Does the Lord Jesus Christ speak those awful words to you? Obviously, our Lord here asserts the reprobation of those people standing before him who would not believe his gospel. The fact is there are goats as well as sheep in this world. There are reprobates as well as elect sinners among Adam’s sons and daughters. There are vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy in this world (Romans 9:10-24; 1 Peter 2:6-8; Jude 4; John 12:39-40). The same sun that melts

the wax hardens the clay; and the same gospel that melts the hearts of God's elect hardens the hearts of the reprobate.

"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep!" — What do those words mean? I'll tell you exactly what they mean. Those words mean. — I never loved you (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 9:13). — I never knew you (Romans 8:29-30). — I never chose you (Acts 13:48). — I never entered into a covenant to save you (Jeremiah 31:31-34). — I am not your Surety (Hebrews 7:22). — I did not redeem you (Isaiah 53:8; John 10:11, 15). — I did not come to save you (Matthew 1:21). — I have never prayed for you (John 17:9, 20). — I never called you (Romans 8:29-30; 2 Timothy 1:9). — I sent you a strong delusion that you should believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). — I have set the world in your heart, so that you cannot find my work and know me (Ecclesiastes 3:11). — I have blinded your eyes so that you cannot see (Isaiah 6:9-10; John 12:39-40; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

"Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep." — That means God is determined to destroy you. There is no hope for your soul.

Your Fault

God has mercy on whom he will; and whom he will, he hardens. There is no question about that fact. And your unbelief will not nullify God's purpose or alter his will. Your everlasting damnation will cause no grief in glory. The only person you injure by your rebellion is yourself. And you heap upon yourself the fire of hell forever by your unbelief. God will send you to hell because you demanded that he leave you alone. God will send you to hell only because you justly deserve to go to hell (Romans 6:23; Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1). If you go to hell it will be your fault alone. You will have no one to blame but yourself.

Praise

Third, I want us to see that our Lord's assertion of reprobation should inspire praise and thanksgiving in the hearts of his elect (vv. 27-30). The Lord God could have left you to yourself. He could have abandoned you. But he chose you to salvation!

"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (vv. 26-30).

Every time we think about God's just judgment upon poor reprobates, lost forever, forever abandoned by God, let us lift our hearts in praise to our great and glorious Lord God, the God of all grace, the Father of mercies, who has saved us by his grace.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-14).

"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, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,

should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:3-7).

Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do, you believe because you are one of his sheep. You were given to him by the Father in eternity. You were redeemed by him at Calvary, sought and found by him in mercy, called by him in salvation. You are kept by him in grace and shall soon be presented by him before the Father's throne with joy!

“They shall never perish.”

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”
– John 10:27-30

Sheep are weak, helpless, defenseless creatures. They have no strength to withstand their enemies. If they are lost, they cannot find their way home again. If sick, they cannot fight off their disease. If threatened, they cannot run fast enough to escape danger. If attacked, they cannot defend themselves.

The only security sheep have is in their shepherd. If their shepherd is wise, good, and strong, they are secure. If the sheep survive, if they live and flourish, the honor belongs to the shepherd. If the sheep perish, the blame belongs to the shepherd. It is the shepherd’s responsibility to keep the sheep. Knowing these things, those who are the Lord’s sheep rejoice to hear him say, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”*

The doctrine of our Lord in this text is very plain and obvious: We who believe are Christ’s sheep — weak, helpless, defenseless creatures. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our Shepherd, wise, good, and strong. Because Christ is our Shepherd, we are secure in him. This is what the Son of God, our dear Shepherd, says concerning all his sheep: *“They shall never perish!”* With those words, the Son of God declares the absolute, infallible, unwavering security of God’s elect in Christ.

I realize that some pervert the doctrine of Holy Scripture concerning the eternal security and preservation of God’s elect in Christ. Some twist it into a lie to the eternal ruin of their souls. They attempt to justify their ungodliness by claiming to believe in God’s sovereignty to the exclusion of all responsibility. And they try to soothe their consciences with the delusion that they really are saved, though they live in utter, abhorrent ungodliness. Others cry, “Such teaching as that promotes lawlessness and antinomianism.” Because they must be ruled by law, they presume that everyone must. Because they are forced servants and mercenary soldiers, they presume that there is no such thing as voluntary obedience to the Son of God.

I regret such perversions; but I will not hold back the truth of God for fear that some godless wretch will pervert it, or be offended by it. Our Lord never hesitated to proclaim the truth, even when he knew the people to whom he was preaching would twist his words, pervert his doctrine, or be offended by the gospel he preached. When our Master preached the fulfillment of the law, his enemies said, “He is an enemy of the law.” When he preached election, they took up stones to kill him. When the Son of God preached the free forgiveness of sin, they said, “He is the friend of publicans and sinners, a promoter of licentiousness.” When the Lord Jesus Christ preached moral freedom, freedom of conscience, his enemies said, “He is a glutton and a wine bibber.”

Following the example of Christ, I want all who read these lines to know and rejoice in the absolute security and preservation of God’s elect in Christ. Some of you may be confused by this doctrine. Some may twist and pervert my doctrine to the ruin of their own souls. But, for those who believe God, the doctrine set forth in this chapter will be full of comfort, peace, assurance and joy for their souls.

Perseverance

Without question, the Word of God teaches the perseverance of the saints. Those who are born of God must and shall persevere. They will continue in the faith of Christ. God's elect both believe and keep on believing. The true believer begins in faith, lives in faith, and dies in faith. True faith never quits (Matthew 10:22; John 8:31; 1 Corinthians 15:1; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:6, 14). The Word of God is very clear in this matter: Only those who continue in the faith shall enter into glory. This is the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints.

Preservation

However, the Bible also teaches the preservation of God's elect in Christ. Those who are truly born of God will most certainly persevere in faith, because we are preserved in Christ by almighty grace. Not one of God's elect shall ever perish. The Word of God teaches the preservation of the saints just as plainly, just as fully, just as forcibly as it teaches the perseverance of the saints. Perseverance is the believer continuing in faith. Preservation is God keeping his people in faith. Perseverance is the believer holding Christ by the hand of faith. Preservation is Christ holding the believer by the hand of grace.

“Jesus is our God and Savior, Guide, and Counselor, and Friend:
He will never, never leave us, Nor will let us quite leave Him.”

Having Christ as our Shepherd, all of God's sheep are absolutely secure in his hands. It is not possible for any true believer to perish, because we are preserved by the grace of God in Christ.

A Divine Distinction

Here is a divine distinction: — *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”* Let men denounce it as they may, the God of the Bible does distinguish between men. He chooses some and passes by others. He redeems some and leaves others under the curse. He calls some and rejects others. He saves some and does not save others. Grace is God's prerogative. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy (Romans 9:16).

Our Lord clearly teaches his sovereignty in salvation in this chapter. He said to the unbelieving Jews who refused to believe his word, *“Ye are not of my sheep.”* And he told them that the reason for their unbelief was the fact that they were not his sheep (v. 26). The gift of faith and all other grace is reserved for God's elect.

Catch these words and let them sink into your heart. God our Savior says of you and I who believe, these people are *“my sheep.”* In everlasting love, by sovereign grace, the Son of God has distinguished us from all other people, and made us to be his own sheep, his own peculiar possession.

All who believe are Christ's sheep by a distinct election. We became his sheep by his own eternal choice. In the covenant of grace God branded his sheep and set a hedge about them, securing their eternal salvation (v. 16). The Lord Jesus says, *“I know them.”* And his knowledge is the peculiar knowledge of his own elective, omniscient love. Blessed word of grace this is. Christ knows his sheep! He knows who they are, where they are, what they are, all that they have done and all that they have been, what he will make of them, when he will be gracious to them, and how to bring them home.

We are his sheep by a distinct purchase, too. *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep”* (vv. 11, 15). The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for his sheep, in the place of his sheep, as our Substitute, in our room and stead. He offered himself as a voluntary sacrifice for sin. The Son of God died as a vicarious Substitute, suffering the penalty of the law for his sheep. Our great Savior accomplished redemption for us as a victorious Savior.

And God's elect are made to be his by a distinct call. — *"He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out."* *"My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me."* This is that special irresistible call that Christ issues to his sheep alone. It is always effectual. It always accomplishes salvation. It always brings the sheep to the Shepherd. The good Shepherd calls his own sheep, and no one else (v. 3). He calls his sheep by name. When he calls them, he effectually leads them out. — Out of darkness into light! — Out of bondage into liberty! — Out of death into life! And they follow him. *"These are they that follow the Lamb withersoever he goeth."* Do you hear the Shepherd's voice?

The Lord assures us of something else regarding his sheep. His sheep will not follow a stranger. They know truth from error (v. 5; 1 John 2:20, 27). Those who are his sheep are taught of God; and, being taught of God, they have the mind of Christ and are enabled by his Spirit to discern truth from error in all matters spiritual.

A Divine Gift

Here is a divine gift. — *"I give unto them eternal life."* This is one reason why we must believe in the eternal security of God's elect. Eternal life is the gift of God. It is not God's offer to men, but God's operation in men. Eternal life comes to chosen, redeemed sinners as a matter of free grace. Man does not have eternal life by nature. Eternal life does not evolve from man's sinful heart by some mysterious process of "spiritual evolution." It is given to men graciously. It is performed in the heart by the power of God's sovereign grace. The very word "give" forbids the idea that eternal life comes to men as a matter of debt or reward. *"The gift of God is eternal life."* There was nothing in our hearts or conduct, which caused God to bestow eternal life upon us (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 2:1-4). And there is nothing in the believer's heart or conduct which can cause God to take away his gift of eternal life (Isaiah 54:10; Psalm 89:30-36).

R. L. Dabney wrote, "God was not induced to bestow his renewing grace in the first instance by anything which he saw meritorious and attractive in repenting sinners; and therefore the subsequent absence of everything good in them would be no new motive to God for withdrawing his grace."

It is contrary to the nature and character of God to take away his gifts so freely bestowed (Romans 11:29). This gift of eternal life is a gift freely bestowed. It is in no way dependent upon the contingencies of this present, mortal existence. If we acknowledge that eternal life is entirely the gift of God, in no way earned by or dependent upon the goodness of man, it must be concluded that those to whom eternal life is given are eternally secure in Christ (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Any child who has not been blinded by religious error must recognize that eternal life must of necessity be eternal. I realize that *"eternal life"* refers more to the quality of the believer's life union with Christ than it does to the duration of his life. But it certainly implies a life of eternal duration. When our Lord says, "eternal," he means *"eternal."* How can life be eternal if it comes to an end? If I have received from God the gift of eternal life, it is not possible for me, by any act of mine, or upon any grounds, to lose it and perish. *"The gift of God is eternal life."* That which is born of God, the new nature created in us by the power of God cannot sin and cannot die (1 John 3:5-9).

The believer's life must be eternal because it is a life in union with Christ. We who believe are so really and truly joined to Christ that we cannot possibly perish, unless he also perishes. We are truly one with Christ. He says, *"Because I live, ye shall live also."* This union between Christ and his people is an immutable, indissolveable union. We are married to Christ (Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:30). We are members of Christ's body, the church (Ephesians 1:23). Can you imagine Christ with a maimed body? Perish the thought! Yet, his body would not be complete if so much as one member were lost.

The believer's life in Christ must be a life of eternal duration, because we are preserved in life by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit was sent into the world both to call and to preserve God's elect. He is the Giver of life and the Preserver of life. The Spirit of God is the seal of the new covenant (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30). A seal is a mark of ownership. It is that which keeps something legally secure. A seal suggests permanent freshness. A seal means everything is okay!

A Divine Promise

Here is a divine promise. — *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish."* Our Lord Jesus here makes a blanket, unconditional promise. It takes into consideration all times, all circumstances, all contingencies, all events, and all possibilities. Our Lord says, concerning all his sheep, *I give unto them eternal life,* and because they are my sheep and I give eternal life to them, *"they shall never perish."*

What if they are babes in Christ and their faith is weak? *"They shall never perish."* What if they are young men in Christ and their passions are strong? *"They shall never perish."* What if they are old men and their vision grows dim? *"They shall never perish."* What if they are tempted? *"They shall never perish."* What if they are tried? *"They shall never perish."* What if all hell breaks loose against them? *"They shall never perish."* What if they sin? *"They shall never perish."* What if they sin again? *"They shall never perish."* What if they fall? *"They shall never perish."* What if they fall seven times a day? *"They shall never perish."* What if they fall seventy times in a day? *"They shall never perish!"*

This promise takes in all the flock. *"They shall never perish."* Not one of Christ's sheep shall ever perish; no, not even one! This is not a distinctive privilege reserved for a favored few. It is a common mercy to all the chosen flock. If you are a believer, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have received eternal life, you shall never perish! Christ himself has promised it. No, you cannot even sin away the grace of God bestowed upon you in Christ. Noah's fall did not alter God's grace. Abraham's weakness did not make God's grace less strong. Lot's wickedness did not make him less righteous before God. David's crime did not cause him to perish. Peter's denial of the Lord did not cause his Lord to deny him. *"Salvation is of the Lord!"* Christ's sheep shall never perish.

This doctrine of the believer's security in Christ is in every way consistent with all revealed truth. It is most surely believed among the people of God. Deny this promise and with it you deny every promise of God. If one word from God cannot be believed, no word from God can be believed. Here are seven reasons why the sheep of Christ shall never perish.

1. The promise of God must be fulfilled — *"They shall never perish"* (2 Tim. 2:19; 1 John 3:19).
2. The purpose of God cannot be frustrated (John 6:37-40). God's covenant cannot be disannulled. God's purpose in election cannot be overturned. The suretyship engagements of Christ cannot be defeated (Hebrews 2:13).
3. The redemptive work of Christ cannot be nullified (Isaiah 53:10-11).

The Book of God declares an actual, literal, accomplished, substitutionary redemption. Since Christ died for his sheep, in their room and in their place, they cannot and shall not die. He paid all our debts. — We have no debt to pay. He bore all our punishment. — There is no punishment left for us to bear. Christ satisfied the offended justice of God for us. — There is nothing left for us to bear, and nothing for us to satisfy. Justice pleads as strongly as mercy for the eternal salvation of those people for whom Christ died at Calvary (Romans 5:10; 8:31-34). If even one of those for whom Christ died were to perish, then his purpose in dying for them would be frustrated (Ephesians 5:25-27; Galatians 1:4-5; Titus 2:14). If even one of those for whom Christ died were to perish, then he could never see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

4. The believer's justification in Christ is an irreversible act of grace.

The trial is over. The court of heaven has pronounced an irreversible verdict upon us — “Justified!” God will not impute sin to a believing soul (Romans 4:8). God has put away our sins forever by the sacrifice of his Son. Our acceptance before God is in Christ. Our justification is free, full, and forever!

5. The work of God’s grace can never be defeated (Philippians 1:6).

That which God has begun he will carry on to perfection. God is willing to complete his work in us. God is wise enough to complete his work in us. God is strong enough to complete his work in us. Without the least presumption, every true believer may gladly sing,

“The work which God’s goodness began, The arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is yea and amen, And never was forfeited yet:
Things future, nor things that are now, Not all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego, Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands, Eternity will not erase:
Impressed on His heart it remains In marks of indelible grace:
Yes, I to the end shall endure, As sure as the Earnest is given,
More happy, but not more secure, The glorified spirits in heaven.”

6. The intercessory work of Christ must prevail (John 17:9-11, 15, 20; 1 John 2:1-2). “Our cause can never, never fail, For Jesus pleads and must prevail!”
7. The seal of the Holy Spirit cannot be broken (Ephesians 1:13-14).

A Divine Security

Here is a divine security. — “*Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*” We are preserved in the heart of his love. And we are preserved in the hands of his power. “*All thy saints are in thy hands.*” We are in the hands of Christ our God and Savior. We are always in his hands. What a blessed place to be! This is the place of our security. These are the hands that were pierced to redeem us. These are the hands of omnipotent power. These are the hands that hold the reins of universal dominion. These are the hands that hold us in life. These are the hands of God himself. — “*My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one*” (John 10:29-30).

Man’s Response

This blessed doctrine of the believer’s security in Christ always draws a strong response from men. The self-righteous religionist says, “That is a dangerous doctrine. Such a doctrine will lead men into sin.” The presumptuous professor of religion will say, “Let us sin that grace may abound.” The true believer will say, “Such marvelous grace compels me to give my heart to Christ in undivided love, praise, and devotion.” (See Romans 11:33 - 12:2). Grace produces gratitude; and gratitude produces devotion.

Perhaps you are asking, “How can I know that this word of grace is for me?” This word of grace is for every self-confessed sinner who trusts Christ alone as Lord and Savior. If I trust him, it is for me. If you trust him, it is for you. Do you hear the Shepherd’s voice? Do you follow Christ? If so, you have eternal life; and you shall “*NEVER PERISH.*”

“Thou, being a man, makest thyself God.”

“Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.” (John 10:31-42)

In the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel our Lord Jesus plainly declared himself to be the Son of God, one with and equal with the Father in all things. The Pharisees who heard his words clearly understood what he said. They took up stones to stone him, not because they did not understand his doctrine, but because they clearly understood it and hated it. They hated his doctrine and hated him for preaching it, because, though they were very religious and very strict in their practice of religion, they hated God.

Before we look at the things revealed in that last section of John 10, let me remind you of the things our Lord Jesus has just declared to this multitude of religious rebels in the temple. These Pharisees and Jews were gathered in Jerusalem at the temple to celebrate one of their many man made religious festivals and ceremonies — The Feast of the Dedication.¹ In their pomp and pretense, they had gathered to declare and show their dedication to the Lord; but before their festivities were over, they tried to kill the God to whom they claimed to be utterly dedicated!

Why were they so enraged against the Lord Jesus? What made them mad enough to pick up stones and try to murder him in the very temple of God? He declared himself to be the only Door of salvation, saying, “*I am the Door*” (v. 9). The Lord Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd God promised to raise up over his elect, by whom he promised to gather his sheep unto himself (vv. 11-15). Then, the Savior declared to those proud, racially bigoted Jews that the sheep he came to save were not just Jews, but Gentiles, too (vv. 16-18). On top of all that, the Lord Jesus, the Man Christ Jesus, plainly asserted that he is God, one with the Father (v. 30).

“*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him!*” — Can you picture the scene? They were angry when the Lord’s discourse began. The more he talked, the more angry they got. Soon, their anger turned to rage, and their rage broke forth in attempted murder. Then, “*Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God*” (vv. 32-33).

We read the chapter together earlier. So let me just call your attention to the things set before us by the Spirit of God in verses 31-42.

Man’s Hatred of God

¹ John Gill tells us, “This was the feast of dedication, appointed by Judas Maccabaeus and his brethren, on account of purging the temple, and renewing the altar, after the profanation of them by Antiochus; which feast lasted eight days, and began on the twenty fifth of the month Cisleu, which answers to part of our December.”

The *first* thing here displayed in the most glaring manner is the hatred of God that possesses the heart of every human being by nature. The enraged Jews declare by example that which we read in Romans 8:7. — “*The carnal mind is enmity against God!*” Oh the extreme wickedness of humanity! Man hates his Maker. The creature hates his Creator. As one of the old writers put it, — “Unconverted men would kill God himself if they could only get at Him.”

The unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem were not moved by our Lord’s miracles or by his message. They were determined not to have him as their King, as the Christ, the Messiah, the Shepherd of Israel. So “*they took up stones again to stone him,*” just as they had done back in John 8:59.

Our Lord had done them no injury. He was no robber, murderer, or rebel against the law of the land. He was one whose whole life was spent doing good. He “*went about doing good*” (Acts 10:38) for thirty-three years. There was no fault or inconsistency in his character. No crime could be laid to his charge. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled. Such a man, perfect and spotless, had never walked upon the face of this earth. Yet the Jews hated him and thirsted for his blood. How true are the words of Scripture: — “*They hated me without a cause*” (John 15:25; Psalm 35:19).

We should never be surprised when we meet with the same hatred as our blessed Lord met with at the hands of zealous religious people. Many, in their proud self-righteousness, like to convince themselves that men hate them because they are so much more righteous than others, that their righteousness exposes the wickedness in others. That is not the doctrine of this passage, or the doctrine of this Book in any other passage.

Do not misunderstand me. I am fully aware that if you are known for behaving uprightly, behaving in a manner that others know is right, and they refuse to do what their own consciences tell them they ought to do, you will invoke their jealousy and rage. But you do not have to be a believer to do what is right in that sense, and enrage people by doing it. And that is not the case here.

These people did not hate our Lord Jesus because of his goodness as a man. They had no quarrel with him for doing good things: feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, raising the dead, calming the storm. They were enraged because he performed his miracles on the Sabbath, but not because he performed them. And no one will ever hate you for doing good things. I never knew anyone to be hated for being honest, telling the truth, being fair in trade, wearing modest clothes, being sober, reading the Word of God, praying, giving, charity, attending church, etc.

That which enrages the world against God’s elect today is the very same thing that enraged these Jews against our Lord, the very same thing that enraged Cain against Abel; it is the gospel we believe and preach, the testimony of Jesus. Abel’s righteous works for which Cain hated him were his works of faith (1 John 3:10-13; Genesis 4:3-8; Hebrews 11:4). Cain was enraged because God accepted Abel by grace, without works, by the merit of a slain lamb, but would not accept him and his works of righteousness. Abel’s Righteousness (Christ) exposed Cain’s unrighteousness, the filthy rags of his self-righteous, works religion; and Cain hated Abel because of it (Hebrews 11:4).

The world, especially the religious world, hates God, hates God’s saints, and hates the gospel of God. The Jews took up stones to stone the Lord Jesus in the very house of God, because his doctrine, the gospel of God, left them without hope in themselves, exposing their religion as a refuge of lies; and any man will kill you to protect his gods, unless God destroys them in his heart. That which enraged the Jews and enrages lost religious men and women everywhere is the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ, the gospel of salvation in and by Christ alone. Our Savior tells us plainly we should always expect the hatred of the world, especially the religious world, if we worship him. — “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*” (John 15:18).

Holy Scripture

The *second* thing that we should learn from this passage is the high honor the Lord Jesus puts on Holy Scripture.

“Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (vv. 34-36)

The Lord Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 in reply to these caviling imps. Obviously, he was not trying to answer these Pharisees or calm their rage. His words only enraged them more (v. 39). Our Lord’s reference here to the Book of Psalms was for the benefit of his disciples who were standing by and for the benefit of his people in all ages.

If the Psalmist called men “*gods*” and “*sons of the highest*,” because they were ordained of God to administer justice in his name (as Moses was to Pharaoh, as David was to Israel and her enemies, and as Joseph was in Egypt), surely it cannot be blasphemy for the Lord Jesus Christ to declare himself the Son of God. He is eternally one with and self-existent with the Father, sanctified by his Father to be our Prophet, Priest, and King, He who was in the fullness of time sent into the world to be the author of eternal redemption to the sons of men is himself God (1 John 5:7). Jesus is “*God blessed forever*” (Romans 9:5).

Our Lord’s purpose here is to show us, as he declares in verse 35, that “*the Scripture cannot be broken*.” Whatever the Scriptures declare on any subject, whether we understand it or not, is true, and is to be received as fact because God declared it. There can be no question about it. The cause is settled and decided. Every jot and tittle of Holy Scripture is true, and must be received as authoritative and conclusive.

This is a matter of vast importance. Grasp it firmly, and never let it go. Every word of the Bible is inspired of God. Inspiration extends not only to the thoughts and ideas of Scripture, but to the very words of Holy Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21).

The Master’s Miracles

Third, we must not fail to see in this portion of Holy Scripture what great importance the Lord Jesus Christ attached to the miracles he performed. He appeals to his miracles as irrefutable evidence of his own divine mission as the Son of God and of his manifest deity. He told the Jews look at them, and deny them if they could.

“Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him.” (vv. 36-38)

We read of our Savior doing things entirely miraculous more than forty times in the Gospel narratives: healing the sick in a moment, raising the dead with a word, casting out devils, calming winds and waves in an instant, walking on the water as on solid ground, and raising the dead. Some were performed privately among friends; but most were wrought in public, under the eyes of unfriendly witnesses.

We are so familiar with these things that we are apt to forget the lessons they are intended to teach. — They teach that he who worked these miracles must be nothing less than very God. They stamp his doctrines and precepts with the mark of divine authority. He alone who created all things in the beginning could suspend

the laws of creation at his will. To reject One who confirmed his mission by such mighty works is the height of madness and folly.

The Lord's miracles all say with one voice, "Jesus of Nazareth is God in human flesh, the Son of God, the Christ; and all who believe on him have everlasting life through his name." Yet, we see but little into the true worth and importance of the miracles of the Lord Jesus, if we see no more than the proof of his divinity in them. The Lord's miracles do loudly assert the divinity of his Person to the carnal sense of man, and did so even to those who hated and blasphemed him. But the grandeur of these works consisted in this: — They were outward testimonies of the far more noble operations of his grace within the soul, which were not to endure for a time only, like their outward signs, but through all eternity.

He gave sight to the blind, that he might testify unto men his sovereign power in giving light and understanding to the mind. — He opened the deaf ear, that men might know by whom alone they can hear aright the good news of salvation and live forever. — The lame he caused, in a moment, to walk, that his people might learn that we can only move, as well as live, by him, and that without him we can do nothing. — He cured the foul leprosy of the body, in order to show that only by him can men be healed of the far more deplorable leprosy of sin, which covers and defiles the soul. — All sicknesses vanished at his command, that we might have hope in him as the Restorer of our souls. The poor (the meek) among men are made rich for eternity by him. — He cast out unclean spirits and suffered them to possess the swine, who were thereby destroyed, that he might teach his redeemed that he alone delivered and can deliver his elect from the powers of darkness, which, being let loose upon the world, drive them violently and swiftly down the steep course of time into a gulf of inextricable woe in hell. — The hungry multitudes were fed by his miraculous power to explain that he is not only the Giver of spiritual life, but also the constant Sustainer and Nourisher of it from day to day. And he did this by small, insignificant means, that the excellency of the power might be known to be his and not in the creatures, however sanctified, blessed and used. — The winds and waves were instantly obedient to his word, that his beloved might rejoice in him as the Still of all spiritual waves, the tumultuous madness of this world, the raging of Satan, and the confusion of all things. These can roar and foam no longer than it pleases him; and when they foam and roar at all, it shall turn out in the end for the good of his people. — The dead were raised to proclaim his power as our risen Lord, and to declare that the issues also of spiritual life and of endless death are altogether in his hands. "*He quickeneth whom he will!*"

Every miracle our Master performed was an act of mercy, by which he revealed, as in parable pictures, countless lessons of mercy, grace, and love. All his works proclaimed him to be both the Creator of all and the Redeemer and Restorer of untold millions that were lost.

Learn from these things, O child of God, what your Lord God has done for your soul. He quickened you when you were dead in trespasses and sins. He gives light and peace to your soul. He feeds you with the Bread of Life. He cures all your spiritual diseases. He quells all your manifold enemies and temptations. He strengthens you with his grace day by day. He does all that is done in you by his grace; and he will never cease working in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

"And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there." (vv. 41-42)

Blessed Spirit of God, graciously cause chosen, redeemed sinners to resort to the Lord Jesus and believe on him unto life everlasting.

Lessons from the Blessed Family at Bethany

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” (John 11:1-57)

On the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem there was once a small village called Bethany. In this chapter God the Holy Ghost takes us back to Bethany, the scene of that great miracle by which our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his eternal deity and omnipotent power as God. I want us to glean from the events of that great and notable day some spiritual lessons for the spiritual instruction and edification of our souls. As we do, I trust that our hearts and minds will be focused upon him who is the Resurrection and the Life, our all-glorious Christ, the Son of God, who raised Lazarus from the dead.

He who raised Lazarus from the dead at Bethany continues to raise sinners from death to life today by the power of his grace.

Sickness

Here is the *first* lesson taught in this chapter. It is a lesson we need to learn, lay to heart and often remind ourselves of: — True believers often suffer from sickness and disease in this world.

“Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” (vv. 1-4)

Sickness is not a sign of God’s displeasure or a lack of faith on our part. The fact is, sickness is sent to us by our heavenly Father for our benefit. That which is aggravating to our bodies is often good for our souls. Sickness tends to draw our affections away from the world to Christ. Sickness sends us to our knees, sends us to our Bibles, and sends us to our Savior. Anything that accomplishes these things is good.

Sickness reminds us that life in this world, at its best, is but a vapor that is soon gone. Sickness forces us to look to the grave, look past the grave to judgment, and look past the judgment to eternity. Whenever sickness comes, be it nothing more than a cold or something as serious as cancer, let us be patient before the Lord, ever mindful of the fact that sickness is the fruit of sin. Sickness is the forerunner of death. Sickness and health, life and death are alike in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. For believers sickness is never unto death. And our sicknesses, whatever they are, are for the glory of God.

Faith

Here is the *second* lesson: — True faith submits to the will of God. When Lazarus fell sick, his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word to the Lord Jesus, their Master and most tender, caring, affectionate Friend, saying, “*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick*” (v. 3). They did not ask him to come to Bethany. They did not ask him to heal their brother, though that is what they obviously hoped he would do. They simply left the matter in his hands, confident that he would do what was best.

Like Eli of old, they said, “*It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.*” We would be wise to follow their example. Our best, ablest, wisest, and most considerate Helper is God our Savior. Christ is our best Friend, especially in time of need. The best thing for us to do in trouble is to fall on our knees and worship, as Job did. Like Hezekiah, let us spread our case before our God.

In the hurry and excitement of trouble and the annoyance and pain of sickness, always remember that none can help like him who “*took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses*” (Matthew 8:17). None is so kind, gracious and caring as our Redeemer, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmity.

Faith submits to the will of God. Yet, we must never imagine that perfect faith will be found in any sinner in this world. Though Martha and Mary were true believers, though they were choice companions of our Savior, there was much weakness and unbelief in them. Both Martha and Mary seem to have misjudged the Master’s delay in coming to Bethany and his intentions toward them and Lazarus. Even when he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, when he commanded them to take away the stone from his tomb, Martha argued with her Lord.

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.” (v. 39)

It is very easy to talk about faith when we are healthy and strong and have money in the bank. But it is hard to practice faith when we are sick and weak and broke. When all is darkness, when neither the sun, nor the moon, nor stars appear, it is not easy to be confident. The fact is, the strongest believer’s faith is very fragile and apt to break in times of great trial.

Still there is another thing revealed in this chapter about faith. Our Lord tells us plainly (v. 40) that, if we would believe, we would see the glory of God. — “*Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*” Faith in Christ sees the glory of God in the gospel, in creation, in providence, and in grace. Faith sees the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the salvation of sinners by his perfect righteousness and his precious, sin-atonement blood.

The Love of Christ

Here is the *third* lesson set before us in this chapter: — The Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, loves all his elect alike. We read in verse 5, “*Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.*” Here are three chosen sinners. All were saved by the grace of God. All were alike the objects of electing love, redeeming blood, and saving grace. But they were not all alike. Martha appears to have been a bit too pushy and domineering. Mary appears to have been very spiritual, though perhaps somewhat negligent of earthly responsibilities. Of Lazarus we are told nothing, except that the Lord Jesus raised him from the dead. Yet, we are told plainly that the Lord Jesus loved all three. He loved them all alike. He loved them all for the same reason. He loved them all to the same degree.

Our Savior’s love for us is free, sovereign, everlasting, and unchanging. It does not depend upon us, what we are, what we do, or what we fail to do in any way.

We must not undervalue others because they are different from us. Flowers in a garden are all different. But it is their difference that makes their contribution to the garden needful and beautiful. Your children are all different from one another; but loving parents do not care less for one child and more for another because they are different.

Even so, in the Kingdom of God, among God’s true children, there are differing degrees of grace, faith, and maturity. But the least, the weakest, and the most feeble of the Lord’s disciples are no less the objects of his love than the greatest, strongest, and most steadfast.

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

when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!" (vv. 30-36)

Those who show kindness to others usually find great blessedness for themselves in doing so. The little house in Bethany was filled with mourners when the Lord Jesus arrived. These mourners probably knew very little about these women and their faith in Christ. But they felt the pain of their neighbors and came in their time of bereavement to do what they could to comfort Martha and Mary. As a result of their kindness, they reaped a rare, rich, unexpected blessing. They were allowed to be eyewitnesses to the greatest miracle performed by our Lord during his earthly ministry. They saw Lazarus raised from the dead. For many of them the raising of Lazarus led to a resurrection in their souls. That was the day of their spiritual birth. — "*Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.*" (v. 45)

These things are written for our learning. There is no healthier employment in the world than to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, to weep with those that weep, to try to bear one another's burdens and lighten one another's loads. One great secret to being happy is to make others happy. The wise man, writing by inspiration, said, "*It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting...The heart of the wise man is in the house of mourning*" (Ecclesiastes 7:2,4). The surest way to make yourself miserable is to live for yourself!

These women shared Martha's and Mary's grief and they shared their joy, too. How much more should we who are the Lord's disciples already care for one another in time of need!

Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us that loving someone is being touched by that which touches them, moved by that which moves them, and grieved by that which grieves them. Our Savior knew what he was about to do. Yet, he groaned because Martha and Mary were groaning. He wept because they wept. He was touched and moved by that which touched and moved these two women whom he dearly loved. May God give us grace to be like our Master.

Providence

Here is the *fourth* lesson set before us in this chapter by the Spirit of God: — God's time is always the right time. — "*When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*" (v. 6)

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already." (vv. 11-17)

Our Lord always knows when it is best for him to intervene, when it is best for him best to work, and how. When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two days. He knew Lazarus was dying. Yet, he stayed right where he was. For the sake of his church, for the good of his friends, for the salvation of his chosen, and for the glory of God, he stayed where he was until he knew that it was time for him to appear and act. — Our Lord always intervenes at the right time.

It was in the fulness of time that Christ came to redeem and save his people. Lazarus was dead for four days before Christ came to raise him from the dead. You know that, according to Peter, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. By that calculation, there is a picture of our redemption here. Only four days passed (four thousand years) between our sin and death by the fall of Adam in the Garden and Christ's coming to save us from our sins, "*when the fulness of time was come!*"

In all the affairs of our lives, we need to realize that God's time is the best time for everything. As J. C. Ryle put it, "Nothing so helps us to bear patiently the trials of life as an abiding conviction of the perfect wisdom by which everything around us is managed."

Everything that happens to us is well done, done in the best manner, by the right instrument, and at the right time. We are all naturally impatient when trials come. We want things done now. We cry out like Moses did when Miriam was stricken with leprosy, "*Heal her now, LORD*" (Numbers 12:13). We ought to wait. Our God is too wise to err, too good to do wrong, and too strong to fail. Our times are in his hands. It is our greatest wisdom and faith to patiently wait for him to do what he will, when he will. When we are sick, he knows the best time to heal us and the best way. When we are in trouble, he knows the best time to deliver us and the best way. When we need help, he knows the best time to help and the best way.

Death

Here is our *fifth* lesson: — Because Christ is the Resurrection and the Life and we live in him God's elect shall never die (vv. 11-14, 25-26).

"These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." (vv. 11-14)

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (vv. 25-26)

Without question, we must all die in a physical sense. These bodies of clay must return to the dust. And you who are without Christ must die the second death, which is everlasting separation from God in hell. But believers do not die. When our bodies cease to function, when our earthly tabernacle is dissolved, when these houses of clay crumble, we shall be forever with the Lord in life. Those who have experienced the first resurrection, the new birth, shall never taste the second death (Revelation 20:6). For the believer, death is no more than the sleeping of the body for a while. Yet, while the body sleeps, while we shall be absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord. This is exactly what our Lord Jesus told Martha in verses twenty-five and twenty-six.

"*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" — Christ is our Life. We have life from him; and we live in him by virtue of his Resurrection as our Substitute and Savior. He is our Resurrection. We were raised from the dead with him representatively (Ephesians 2:5-6). We have been raised from the dead in him spiritually in the new birth (Revelation 20:6). And we shall be raised from the dead literally by his power at the second coming (1 Corinthians 15: 42-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

"*He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*" — Though we are all by nature sinners, dead in trespasses and in sins, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall live forever. We have everlasting life.

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die! Believest thou this?” — Believers shall never die. God’s elect are immune to death. For the believer death is a graduation, an elevation, a freedom, a liberty, an entrance into a life he longs for and expects. Then, and not until then our most earnest prayers will be answered, our highest, noblest ambitions will be realized, our trials, temptations, and sorrows will be over.

Salvation

Here is the *sixth* lesson given to us in this chapter. — The salvation of a sinner is accomplished by the life-giving, resurrection power of the Son of God.

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (vv. 39-44)

Here, in broad daylight, before many hostile witnesses, a man who had been dead for four days was raised to life again in a moment by the voice of the Son of God! Here was public proof that our Lord Jesus Christ has absolute power over the material world. A corpse already corrupt and rotting was made alive in an instant. Here was public proof that our Lord Jesus Christ has absolute power over the spirit world. A soul that had left this tabernacle of clay was called back from heaven to earth to live a while longer in mortality.

Yet, great and glorious as these things are, I am certain that these things are recorded here primarily to teach us spiritual lessons about salvation and the way it is accomplished.

Lazarus was dead. That is the spiritual condition of us all by nature. We are all born in a state of spiritual death. That means that we are totally incapable of doing anything to change our condition. If salvation comes, it must come from outside us.

Lazarus was decaying. Just as the dead corpse decays in the earth, so spiritually dead hearts and souls and minds are in a state of unceasing decay, called “*the corruption of this world.*” I do not need to prove that statement to anyone. Things that you once never dreamed you would think, now occupy your mind constantly. Things you thought you could never do, you now practice without thought. If the thoughts of your mind were open to public view, you would be ashamed, if not terrified, to show your face in public.

Lazarus was delivered. Lazarus’ resurrection from the dead and deliverance from the grave is a vivid picture of our spiritual deliverance from death and sin by the grace of God. First, our Savior spoke to the people at the tomb. He said, in verse thirty-nine, “*Take ye away the stone.*” Why? If he could raise the dead, he could easily roll away the stone. But he is demonstrating the fact that though God always acts sovereignly in the salvation of sinners, he never by passes the use of means. We cannot raise the dead; but we can take away the stones. Therefore we are responsible to take away the stones. But the preaching of the gospel we fill the ditches in the way, level the hills, make crooked places straight and the rough ways smooth, and “*take up the stumblingblock out of the way*” of sinners (Isaiah 40:4; 57:14).

Next, our Savior spoke to God the Father.

“Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” (vv. 41-42)

I take that to be a picture of our Savior’s intercession for chosen sinners in heaven. Then, the Lord Jesus spoke directly to Lazarus. — “*And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*” (v. 43) He called Lazarus out of death exactly as he calls sinners out of death by his grace, with a personal, particular, powerful call. The call of God is always irresistible. When God says, “*Live,*” the dead are made to live. When God says, “*Come,*” those who cannot come to Christ immediately come to Christ.

After Lazarus was risen, our Savior spoke to the people again. — “*And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go*” (v. 44). That is the mission of God’s church in this world. First, we are to remove the stones which hinder men from coming to Christ. We do that by preaching the gospel of God’s free grace in him. Then, when sinners are saved by the grace of God, it is our job to loose them from the grave clothes of death. We do that by exactly the same means, by preaching the gospel of God’s free grace in Christ. Religion loves to bind men with rules and duties. Christ sets sinners free. By the preaching of the gospel sinners are freed from the grave clothes of religious legalism, self-righteousness, free-willism, and ritualism.

substitution

All of this would really be meaningless if I failed to show you the last thing revealed in this chapter, because the salvation of our souls is an utter impossibility without the sin-atonement, substitutionary sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus Christ in the place of his people.

“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.” (vv. 49-52)

Here is the *seventh* lesson given in this chapter by the Spirit of God. — The only way sinful men and women can be saved from the wrath of God is by the substitutionary sacrifice of that Man who is God in our place.

Though he had absolutely no idea what he was saying, Caiaphas the high priest spoke by the Spirit of God as a prophet. He made two statements, said two things that very few preachers, let alone anyone else in this world, ever come to know. But these two things are vital to the gospel. Apart from these two things there is no gospel.

Justice must be satisfied. — “*It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not*” (v. 50). The Lord Jesus has fully satisfied the justice of God for his elect by his death upon the cursed tree. Since the Lord Jesus Christ has died as our Substitute, fully satisfying the justice of God for us, all for whom he died can never die, all the children of God, all God’s elect, every ransomed sinner must be gathered together in everlasting salvation.

Lazarus Raised — Irresistible Grace

“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (John 11:1-12:11)

Do you know anything about the love-calls of our omnipotent Savior? It is impossible not to know them, if you have ever heard them. The soul that hears the voice of the Son of God, though he never heard it before, knows the sweet sound of the Shepherd’s voice. When the Savior speaks to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, he speaks with...

- A Loud Voice that Cannot be Missed (John 11:43).
- A Powerful Voice that Cannot be Resisted — “*The voice of the Lord is powerful: the voice of the Lord is full of majesty!*” (John 11:44; Psalm 29:3-11)
- A Still Small Voice that No One Hears but the One Called (1 Kings 19:9-14).
- A Sweet, Loving, Winning Voice that Causes the One Called to Arise and Seek the Lord (Song of Solomon 5:2).
- And A Personal Voice that Causes the One Called to Know He is Called (Luke 19:5).

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of God’s church and of every Gospel preacher to preach the Gospel to all men as the Lord gives them opportunity (Mark 16:15-16). I recognize that the greatest privilege that has ever been bestowed upon a man is the privilege of preaching the Gospel to men, to speak to men on God’s behalf. The highest calling in the world, the greatest privilege that can be given to a mortal man is to be sent of God to proclaim the Gospel of redeeming grace to perishing men. But, while this is the greatest privilege in the world, it is also the greatest responsibility in the world. It is an awesome thing to speak to men with immortal souls on the behalf of the eternal God.

In fulfilling this responsibility, basically, three things are required of a man: sincerity, simplicity, and steadfastness. The preacher must be sincere in his motives, free of deceit, serving the souls of men, not himself. He must preach the Gospel with simplicity. To preach with simplicity is to preach with bold decisiveness, with clarity, the singular message of redemption accomplished by the sin-atoning sacrifice of Christ. To preach the Gospel with simplicity is to preach so as to be understood. And we must be steadfast, never allowing ourselves to be turned aside or diverted in any way from our purpose and our message.

It is the responsibility of all who hear the Gospel to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). — “*God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*” I rejoice to declare to all men everywhere, that any sinner in all the world who calls upon Christ in true faith shall be saved. It is written, “*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” I know that all are responsible before God to believe that which is plainly revealed in his Word. And I know that all who believe on Christ shall be saved (Acts 16:31). Indeed, if you believe, God has saved you! — “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life!*”

Yet, I know that no man by nature can or will come to Christ. Fallen man has neither the desire nor the ability to trust Christ (John 5:40; 6:44). It is not within the realm of man’s power, and it is not within the scope of his heart’s desire to come to Christ. Unless God does for a sinner what that sinner cannot and will not do for himself, he will perish. None can believe, except God himself create faith in them and cause them to trust his Son.

God's Gift

And we know that true saving faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8; John 6:37-40). This is our Savior's doctrine. — No one can come. — Anyone may come. — Someone shall come. — *"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power!"* — And all who do come to him shall be saved forever! — *"Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee."*

If any man comes to Christ, believing on him unto life everlasting, he does so because God has drawn him to Christ by the effectual power and irresistible grace of his Spirit. True faith is the result of, not the cause of, Divine grace. Saving faith is created in a man's heart by the mighty, sovereign operations of God the Holy Spirit in omnipotent, saving grace. We who believe, believe *"by the greatness of his power"* and *"according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ Jesus when he raised him from the dead"* (Ephesians 1:19-20). The faith that we have and exercise in Christ is performed in us by *"the operation of God"* (Colossians 2:12).

This creation of faith in the heart, by which a person is drawn to Christ, is what we call "Effectual Calling," or "Irresistible Grace." The effectual calling of the Holy Spirit is that sovereign, gracious, irresistible work and operation of God the Holy Spirit, which changes a man's heart and will, causing him to come to Christ and be saved by faith in him. Effectual calling is the tender influence, overpowering love, compelling grace, and irresistible power of God the Holy Spirit which causes a person to gladly and willingly receive Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who by nature, if left to themselves, would not come to Christ, are made willing to come to him in effectual calling.

There are many, many pictures of this effectual calling and irresistible grace in the Scriptures, pictures that beautifully illustrate this blessed act of God's grace by which chosen, redeemed sinners are made to experience that grace that was given to them in Christ Jesus before the worlds were made, many pictures of grace, by which God illustrates the Gospel message of salvation by grace alone. One of the most instructive of these pictures is the resurrection of Lazarus. In the 11th and 12th chapters of John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit tells us five things about Lazarus and his call from death to life that picture God's irresistible grace in the salvation of his elect.

His Condition

First, Lazarus' condition is plainly declared in John 11:14. Lazarus was dead. — *"Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead."* That is the state of all human beings by nature, spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, incapable of either knowing or changing their condition (Romans 5:12). The dead cannot move toward God. The dead have neither will nor ability to come to Christ. The dead do not desire God's salvation. The dead cannot see. The dead cannot understand. The dead must be raised from death to life by the power of God; that resurrection is the new birth, the first resurrection (John 5:25; Ephesians 2:1-10; Revelation 20:6). As Lazarus' sickness and death was *"for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby"* (v. 3), so our sin and death in our father Adam was *"for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."*

His Calling

Look at John 11:43 and you will see Lazarus' calling. That is the *second* thing I want you to see. Lazarus' calling was a picture of our calling, the effectual, irresistible call of God's omnipotent grace by which all who are saved are saved. — *"And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth."* When the Lord Jesus cried, *"Lazarus, come forth,"* the dead man arose to life.

There is a general call which goes out to all men whenever the Gospel is preached; but this was not a general call. This was a personal, particular, powerful call, irresistible, effectual, and distinguishing. The only way any sinner will ever be saved is if the Son of God, by the power of his Spirit, calls him from death to life.

And all who are called by him live by him, with him, and in him (John 5:25). Our election and redemption are made manifest and made sure to our souls by this act of God's omnipotent mercy (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5).

His Conversion

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” — Once he was called, Lazarus was converted. His conversion was both immediate and gradual. He was immediately changed from death to life. But he was gradually freed from his “grave clothes”. And sinners saved by grace are immediately transformed into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). But throughout our lives we are being saved, gradually, from the “grave clothes” of sin and unbelief, legalism and self-righteousness, and religious customs, traditions, and rituals (2 Corinthians 7:1). The Savior's command is, *“Loose him, and let him go”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). And by the preaching of the Gospel, saved sinners are loosed, not bound with fetters of law, but loosed in the blessed liberty of grace.

His Communion

Fourth, in chapter 12 we see Lazarus sitting at the table with the Lord Jesus in sweet communion. — *“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him”* (vv. 1-2).

Soon after his resurrection, Lazarus is found sitting at the table with his Savior. Do not miss this: — The house and the table belonged to Lazarus; but the Master of the house was Christ. Lazarus surrendered all to his Lord (Luke 14:25-33). The believing, surrendered heart is the heart with which Christ holds sweet communion. I can almost hear Lazarus' heart, as he sat there at the table with the Lord Jesus...

“I am Thine, O Lord! I have heard Thy voice;
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to Thee!

Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord,
By the pow'r of grace divine;
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
And my will be lost in Thine!”

His Conflict

Fifth, in John 12:9-11 we find Lazarus in the midst of terrible conflict, with men trying to kill him. Because of Lazarus, many others believed; but the Jews sought to kill him. Why? Because he had been raised from the dead. That is all. He had been the blessed recipient of God's great grace, and they had not. Therefore, they sought to kill him. This is the last we hear of Lazarus. His life with Christ was a life of unceasing conflict in this world. And all who believe will find it so with them. That is the way it was in the beginning; and that is the way it shall be until the end (Genesis 4:1-8; John 16:33).

“The Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.”

The Lord God said to Cain, "If your worship is evil, sin lies at the door of your guilty conscience still, tormenting you. Abel's love for you has not changed. He still desires you as his brother. He still respects you as his elder brother, as the firstborn of your father." Still, Cain murdered Abel, for just one reason. Abel was accepted of God in and by Christ. Abel believed God; and Cain, trusting his own righteousness, was still guilty before God. And he knew it.

Abel was chosen. Therefore Abel was redeemed. Being chosen and redeemed, Abel was called. Because he was called, Abel believed. Believing on the Son of God, Abel was justified. Justified in Christ, Abel was accepted and his conscience was clear before God.

Do you know anything about the love-calls of our omnipotent Savior? How I thank God for that sovereign, free, irresistible grace by which I am called! How I praise him that when he called me, he would not take "No" for an answer! O blessed Holy Spirit, call out chosen sinners! O Lord Jesus, blessed Friend of sinners, let the dead now hear your voice that they may live!

"Am I called? And can it be?
Has my Savior chosen me?
Guilty, wretched as I am,
Has He named my worthless name?
Vilest of the vile am I,
Dare I raise my hopes so high?

Am I called? I dare not stay,
Cannot, must not disobey:
Here I lay me at Thy feet,
Clinging to the Mercy-Seat:
Thine I am, and Thine alone;
Lord, with me Thy will be done.

Am I called? What shall I bring
As an offering to my King?
Poor, and blind, and naked I,
Trembling at Thy footstool lie;
Nought but sin I call my own,
Nor for sin can sin atone.

Am I called? An heir of God!
Washed, redeemed, by precious blood!
Father, lead me in Thy hand,
Guide me to that better land,
Where my soul shall be at rest,
Pillowed on my Savior's breast."

Where was Lazarus?

“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth...Loose him, and let him go.” (John 11:11-46)

You are familiar with the story of Lazarus' death and resurrection recorded in John 11. Without question, this mighty display of our Savior's eternal Godhead was intended by our God to give us pictures of two things. It was, I am sure, intended to show us a picture of the spiritual resurrection of God's elect in the new birth by the effectual call and irresistible grace of God our Savior (Ephesians 2:1-7; Revelation 20:6). And Lazarus' death and resurrection pictured the death and resurrection of God's elect with Christ. But, have you ever considered this: — Between the time that he died and the time that he was raised from the dead by our blessed Savior, where was he? During those four days that his body slept in the earth, where was he?

When this miracle had been performed, many of the Jews, seeing “*the things which Jesus did, believed on him.*” Others believed not, but were only hardened in their enmity and opposition to the Savior. The same is true throughout the ages. To many, the works of Christ and the power of his grace, when declared by the gospel, are, by the blessing of God, a sweet savor of life unto life. To others, the word of grace is a savor of death unto death. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit make his Word a sweet savor of life to you who read these lines, for Christ's sake!

Lazarus

Let me say just a few things about Lazarus. First, it should be noted that we are not told in the Scriptures that he ever said anything about the state of his soul while his body was in the grave. In fact, we are told nothing more about him at all, except that he was among those who sat with the Savior at the table in John 12. Lazarus' silence, and the silence of Scripture about his experience should not surprise us. If Paul could not utter words to describe his experience (which was apparently the same as Lazarus'), and could not tell us the things he saw in heaven, it is not surprising that Lazarus said nothing about what he saw in heaven. I see Divine wisdom in that fact. It is ever the tendency of man to sensationalize everything, especially the supernatural, unexplainable interventions of God. Therefore our God wisely draws a curtain over his most remarkable works. And those who experience them consider them too precious, too sacred, too heavenly to talk about. Those who have experienced anything like a miraculous work of God have very little to say about it.

It is also remarkable that the Scriptures tell us absolutely nothing about the feelings of Martha and Mary after Lazarus was raised from the dead. What joy they must have experienced! What gratitude they must have expressed! What humiliation they must have felt because of their unbelief! Yet, we read nothing of these things. The Lord God in infinite wisdom draws a curtain over them, while at the same time giving us a clear picture of their sorrow and grief. The fact is affliction and sorrow are more profitable for study and meditation than joy.

Yet, the resurrection of Lazarus was one of the most unmistakable and unquestionable revelations of our Savior's eternal Godhead recorded in Holy Scripture. If he could raise a man to life who had been dead for four days, truly he is God with whom “*all things are possible.*” He who is God our Savior can raise dead sinners to life, no matter how corrupt they are. And he will raise us up from the grave at his glorious second advent. The voice that called Lazarus from the tomb will, at the last day, call the bodies of his sleeping saints from their graves! Yes, “*the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and they that hear shall live*” (John 5:25).

My Thoughts

Now, let me give you some of my thoughts about dying. I say, “My thoughts,” but were they only my thoughts they would not be worth anything. These are my thoughts only because God the Holy Spirit has shown them to me in the Book of God and sealed them to my heart. I pray that he will do the same for you.

I write not as a brave man, or as a holy man, but simply as a saved man, as a believing man. Trusting Christ, who alone is all my salvation, I am hopeful that when he comes to receive me unto himself, "*when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning,*" like Mary, I shall rise quickly at the well-known voice of my Beloved and rejoice when it is said, "*The Master is come and calleth for thee.*"

I fully realize that the things I have to say in this study cannot be understood by any who do not know our God. Of all spiritual things, these are most spiritual. And the natural man, no matter how brilliant and well-educated he may be, simply cannot know them. They are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

The Body

First, the Scriptures tell us much about the bodies of God's saints, when the soul is separated from the body in death. Death for the believer is a temporary separation of our souls from our bodies, but not the least separation of us from our Savior.

That everlasting union that is ours with Christ is an indissoluble, indestructible union. That is the basis and security of every blessing we enjoy in time and in eternity. The Scriptures clearly show us that the separation we experience in the death of our souls from our bodies does not separate either the soul or the body of the redeemed from the Redeemer.

Christ's people are as truly his people in death as they are in life. Our union with him is the same. And our interest in him is the same, because he is "*the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.*" God's covenant and promise do not rot with our bodies in the grave. Indeed, the decay of our bodies as they return to dust is ordered by God's covenant and promise to give occasion for the greater manifestation of Christ's glory, and our everlasting blessedness with him in the resurrection.

Brief Separation

The separation we must sustain in death, the separation of our souls from our bodies, shall be but a brief separation, a brief separation that shall be everlastingly compensated by our Lord in the resurrection (Romans 14:8; 1 Corinthians 3:22). When our Lord Jesus revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, he revealed himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God not of the dead, but of the living (Exodus 3:6). Then, after hundreds of years, he stated exactly the same thing, asserting plainly that though the patriarchs had long ago died in the flesh, they were not at all separated from him (Luke 20:37-38). And he declares that this is also an assertion of the fact of the resurrection.

Sleeping

The separation of the soul from the body at death makes no separation of either body or soul from Christ. When our Lord Jesus said, "*our friend Lazarus sleepeth,*" and the Scriptures speak of God's saints sleeping in Christ, there is nothing said about soul sleep. The sleep of God's saints in death refers to their bodies in the grave, sleeping in Christ as they sleep in the earth. And the sleeping bodies of God's saints, "*them which sleep in Jesus,*" he will awake out of sleep (1 Thessalonians 4:14; Romans 8:11).

Sweet Sleep

Far too little has been said and written about the sleeping of our bodies in the arms of our Redeemer. It is a sweet sleep. There is nothing evil connected with it. It is a good, sweet, unspeakably blessed sleep! Be sure you understand this. Both our bodies and our souls are the objects of Christ's mercy, love, and grace. He has

redeemed both my body and my soul. My body is as precious to him as my soul. It is his purchased possession, which is yet to be redeemed (delivered from the consequences of sin) in the resurrection (Ephesians 1:14; 4:30).

Both my body and my soul are the objects Christ's love, and his purchased possession by blood redemption. Yet the conflicts between them are such as produce an unceasing warfare. From the moment of the new birth, unto the moment that the Lord undresses the body for death, — "*The flesh lusteth against the spirit; and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*" (Galatians 5:17).

Groaning

In this body we groan for life. I see nothing but sin in every fiber of my being, and behold what I am in this body of flesh with horror and abhorrence. The leprosy of my body of flesh is loathsome (Job 42:6; Isaiah 6:5; Romans 7:18). Not until I drop this robe of flesh in death, not until my soul is separated from this body will I be freed from the body of inbred, indwelling corruption and the groaning of my soul, longing for that freedom (2 Corinthians 5:4). Then the very being of sin in this body of flesh will be over forever! No hiding place shall then be found for that loathsome thing now burrowed so deeply in my nature that it corrupts everything about me. The vile cesspool of iniquity, all original and actual corruption, shall be dried up and emptied forever!

I feel the blessedness of this in my soul. The anticipation of it is joyous. The hour rapidly advances when I shall never speak another idle word, never have another vile thought, and never again hurt and injure anyone or anything, when I shall at last cease from sin!

Though I know that the whole troop of iniquity will pursue me, like the Egyptian army pursued Israel to the borders of the sea, yet I know also that the new and living way the Lord there opened for his people has been, and is, and will be opened for my salvation. Death ends the warfare. It is written, "*The Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever*" (Exodus 14:13). Child of God, inconceivable blessedness shall be ours immediately in the temporary separation of soul and body!

Christ's Glory

But there is something even more wonderful to contemplate. The separation of our souls from our bodies is a means ordained by our God by which our Lord Jesus Christ shall be seen most glorious and triumphant. This shall be the culminating point to crown all. It is in the dust of his saints that the Lord has laid the foundation for manifesting the special conquests of his Almighty arm in raising us up to glory.

God's glory is the first and ultimate end of all things. The whole purpose, counsel, will, and pleasure of the Triune God, for which he created all things and sustains all things, is the manifestation of "*the glory of his grace*" (Ephesians 1:5-7; Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 43:21; Romans 11:36; Revelation 4:11). It was for this purpose, — that God might be visibly glorified before wondering worlds, visibly glorified in his saints, — that the Son of God assumed our nature, redeemed us, and shall come again to gather his saints unto himself (John 1:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

What can be more suitable and right than that he, who was "*crucified through weakness,*" should alone possess the glory of raising the dead? Our bodies must sleep in the dust until that great day for the express purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ being exalted and glorified as our Redemption and our Resurrection! The temporary separation of soul and body of God's elect at death was and is, in the appointment of God, primarily and above every other consideration, for the personal glory of Christ, and secondarily and subordinately, for our everlasting happiness and bliss.

Where was Lazarus for those four days? — He was with the Lord, awaiting a greater display of the Lord's glory than had yet been displayed in the earth.

What great and marvelous acts of Almighty power shall be executed by our glorious Savior in that great day of God! Try to imagine the nations sleeping in the dust and the sea, which at his call shall then give up their dead.

All who trust Christ alone as Savior and Lord have the assurance of God's own Word that at that glorious day, when Christ shall come "*to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe,*" they shall be found among the blessed "*dead which die in the Lord.*" Let us therefore await, with holy joy and expectation, the hour of God's appointment, when by death the separation of soul and body shall take place. By this means, he makes us ready for Christ's coming, for his triumph and glory.

Are the personal triumphs of Christ to be manifested before the assembled creation of God in that day? Is the dust of God's saints the preparatory means for the greater display of Christ's power and glory? Does this temporary separation of my soul and body give occasion for my God and Savior to get glory by me? If so, then it cannot be doubted that death is for us a blessing to be anticipated, not a curse to dread.

Surely salvation in Christ is worth living for; and the personal glory of Christ in raising me from the dust is worth dying for. May God give me grace, with increasing rapture of soul, to anticipate the time of my appointed departure. It shall be nothing more and nothing less than my body falling asleep in my Savior's arms at night to be awakened by him in his likeness in the morning.

If a young lady goes to bed tonight, joyfully anticipating that tomorrow she will be married to the man she loves, anticipating the day she has planned for a long time, anticipating that which she ardently desires, she will go to bed with excitement, such excitement that she can hardly sleep. But, oh how sweet her sleep will be, because the morning will bring for her a greatly desired new beginning of life.

Shall not the children of God, heirs of his kingdom, lay down in like manner in the sleep which is to be followed by the resurrection morning, that morning which will open into endless glory? — The interval between death and the resurrection shall be but the sweet rest of a brief night. No wonder Paul calls this our "*blessed hope.*" The fulfillment of it shall be eternally blessed beyond imagination. Christ will, at his second coming, "*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*" (Philippians 3:21)

The Soul Departed

Now, let's look at the state of the soul while separated from the body. It must be acknowledged that we know very little of the world of the redeemed in heaven. We are in this present, mortal state incapable of knowing much about it. It is impossible for any of us to form any adequate apprehension of heaven's glory. Yet, God the Holy Spirit has graciously given us love tokens in his Word of the world to come, by which he draws the hearts of chosen, redeemed, saved sinners to Christ in heaven.

Regarding the immediate effect of our souls being temporarily separated from our bodies at death, we have little information; but the little we have is more precious than mountains of gold. There are some things we know. The body returns to the earth for an appointed time; but the soul lives on in another, higher, more spiritual form of life than we can now imagine. We know that "*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*" This we know by the testimony of Holy Scripture, and by the testimony of Scripture being stamped upon our hearts by grace (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

Immediate Glory

As soon as my soul is separated from my body, I shall be with the Lord in heaven, in a body, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. We are not told and cannot imagine what that form is, but it shall be a body, a house suitable to our souls in that blessed state. In the moment of separation, we shall not be found naked, *“but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”* The Lord Jesus said to the dying thief on the cross, *“Today, shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”* And Stephen, in his dying moments, when beholding with an eye of faith our all-glorious Christ on the right hand of the throne, cried out, *“Lord Jesus receive my spirit”* (Acts 7:55-58). While the body sweetly sleeps in the earth, in the arms of Jesus, until the resurrection morning, the soul is with the Lord. In the conscious assurance of this Paul said, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1: 22).

Freed of Self

In that moment, we shall at once be rid of and forever freed from self, self love, and all that selfishness of character which our spirits are encased in in the flesh, freed from that self love we can never subdue while living in this form. Everything we now enjoy, even of a spiritual nature, is tinged with self. If we meditate upon the glories of our God as he reveals himself to us in Christ, if we enjoy seasons of sweet communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ by some renewed revelation from him, if we give thanks to God for his grace or for some special manifestation of grace, self, self love, and self interests corrupt all our thoughts. In heaven, that shall cease to be! There all selfishness is lost in the love of God, for what he is in himself, independent of all that he is to us and all that he has done for us. This is what Paul speaks of in Romans 5, after declaring the unspeakable blessedness of being reconciled to God by the death of his Son; and much more being reconciled and saved by his life, he adds, *“and not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:10-11).

To *“joy in God”* (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), as God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, is a far higher degree of blessedness than all the gifts we can receive from him here. There we shall joy in him, the source of all joy. There self is lost and done away in him. And this is the immediate effect of the soul being temporarily separated from the body.

Face to Face

As soon as my soul is separated from my body, I shall behold my all-glorious Savior face to face, in open and clear vision, with nothing between my soul and my Savior. That sums up everything I can conceive of blessedness. This is what our Savior desires, indescribably more than we do (John 17:24). The thought is rapturous!

Beholding him in all the beauties and glories of his infinite Being is infinitely more than all the benefits we derive from him. We shall be swallowed up and absorbed with beholding him (1 John 3:1-2). While we are everlastingly and unremittingly engaged in beholding him, all other things will occupy our minds no more. Nothing else will crowd into our hearts. There will be room for nothing but him, and more of him!

The Lord God once hung a star in the sky that arrested the attention of the whole world. It was a bright, glorious star. No one could take his eyes off of it. But that star simply pointed to the place where Christ could be found. Just try to imagine what it will be like, not to see his star, but to see him face to face, who is *“the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person!”* That is the immediate and everlasting experience of every saved sinner, as soon as he falls asleep in his Savior’s arms, and the spirit enters *“into the joy of his Lord.”*

Blessed Reunion

This separation of body and soul is but a brief, temporary separation. The body sleeps in Jesus; and the soul lives during the time of separation in the unceasing enjoyment of the presence of Christ. But soon the morning of the resurrection shall come; and the Son of God “*shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.*” Then there shall be a glorious reunion of soul and body, not for me only, not for you only, but for the whole election of grace. All the bodies of all the sleeping saints shall be raised at once, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! All shall at once be united to Christ, the glorious Head of the body, united, without the possibility of separation forever, to Christ and to each other!

What will be the joy of the bride in that hour! What will be the triumphs of our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he shall come, “*to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe?*” Imagination fails to form the least idea of what must be the feeling in that reunion of soul and body. The two parts of self, separated in a moment of sorrow, bereavement, and death, shall meet and be forever united in the joy and glory of the Lord!

The cold, clammy sweat of death on the body, in which the soul left it, shall be changed into all the warmth of life and immortality! The body, sunk in weakness, shall be raised in power! It was sown a natural body. It shall be raised a spiritual body! The soul shall come down from above with Christ and in the power of Christ, perfumed out of the ivory palaces; and the body shall rise to meet the soul, now by Christ changed from a vile body to a glorified body, as much prepared and as fully qualified for the everlasting enjoyment of Christ as the soul! That shall be what Paul calls “*the redemption of the purchased possession.*” Then Christ shall present us, body and soul, “*faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!*”

He who redeemed my soul, at his own appointed time, regenerated my soul. And my body is no less precious to him than my soul. He who redeemed my body as his purchased possession shall, at the divinely appointed time, regenerate my body, too, with life everlasting!

These have been the thoughts and meditations of my heart for many years, without significant interruption. Needless to say, I’ve been enjoying life more fully than ever! I pray that I will never have these thoughts far from my mind, that I may continually look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, crying to the Lord Jesus with his Bride of old, “*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my Beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether*” (Song of Solomon 2:17).

“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

May God the Holy Spirit seal his Word to our hearts, giving us faith in Christ and enabling us from this day forward to live in the blessed hope of God’s boundless, free, eternal grace in Christ!

Our Friends Sleep

“These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” (John 11:11)

That which our blessed Savior said about Lazarus is true of all those blessed dead who die in the Lord. — Their bodies sleep in Christ in the earth.

We have many friends and loved ones whose bodies we have buried in the earth. How many times we have bidden farewell to one we loved, with burning tears running down our cheeks, because we knew they were about to leave this world. But, with regard to those who have died in faith, who have died in Christ, we may say, as our Lord Jesus did of Lazarus, “Our friends are asleep.”

Background

In the previous verses the Lord Jesus received a touching message from Martha and her sister, Mary, telling Him that Lazarus, the one He loved, was sick. Two days later, after Lazarus had died, He headed to Bethany.

The primary thing revealed in John 11 is the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is “*the resurrection and the life.*” Everything in this chapter shows us the blessedness of that revelation. Resurrection can be displayed only where death has come; and that which is emphasized here is the desolation death brings, and man’s helplessness in the presence of it.

First, Lazarus died. Then, it became obvious that the Lord Jesus was going to Bethany to be with Martha and Mary. Then, Thomas speaks of the disciples accompanying the Lord to Bethany that they may die with him (John 11:16). Then Martha comes before us. Though in the presence of Christ, she could think only of the death of her brother (John 11:21). The same was true of Mary (John 11:32). Finally, the Jews who had come to comfort the bereaved sisters are seen “*weeping*” (John 11:33). And, even as the Lord stands before Lazarus tomb, they have no thought that he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:37). What a background this was for our great Savior to display His wondrous glory as “*the resurrection and the life!*”

Spiritual Death

We have before us a picture of physical death, the death of the body. But that is only the figure and the result of something far more solemn, tragic, and dreadful. The natural man is dead in trespasses and sins. And “*the wages of sin is death.*” When the first man, our father Adam, sinned, he received those fearful wages. In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he died, died spiritually. Death was passed upon him and upon all men, as the penal sentence of Divine justice. Adam died not only as a private individual, but as the public head and federal representative of all his race.

If you cut down a tree, severing the trunk of the tree from its roots, it dies. Its branches, twigs, and leaves wither. In like manner, the fall of Adam drug every member of the human race with him into death. That means that every child born into this world enters it “*alienated from the life of God*” (Ephesians 4:18), lost, and spiritually dead.

All men by nature, the world over, are spiritually dead. There is in none even a spark of life which might be fanned into a flame. Fallen man is dead. Being dead, if he is to live, something must be done for him that he cannot do for himself. — “*Ye must be born again!*” Life must be given to you from without, by the mighty work of God. Life must be imparted to you. Christ, who is life, must be formed in you. How is it that dead sinners are

given life? How can the dead be made to live? The Lord Jesus must come to raise the dead by the merit of His blood, the power of His Spirit, and the word of His grace.

That is what we see so strikingly and beautifully illustrated here in John 11. Lazarus was dead; and the Master said, *“I go that I may awake him.”* How utterly helpless we are in the presence of death! You who are dead are helpless. Your friends are helpless. The preacher is helpless. But, blessed be God, there is One who is able to save to the uttermost! Christ is not helpless. He can cause the dead to live.

If the sinner’s problem was merely a matter of ignorance in the sinner, we might overcome that by clearly reasoned statements of the truth. If it was merely a stubborn will that stood in the way of the sinner’s salvation, we could depend upon our powers of persuasion. If the sinner was only sick, we could induce him to accept some remedy. But in the presence of death we are impotent.

“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26), our Savior said in answer to the disciples’ question, *“Who then can be saved?”* Here the light breaks in and shines forth *“for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby”* (v. 4). Man is helpless before death; but Christ is not helpless. Lazarus could not raise himself to life. His loving sisters could do nothing for him. His sorrowing friends could weep; but their weeping was neither heard nor meaningful to Lazarus. He was dead. Then, He who is Himself, *“the resurrection and the life”* steps into the picture and everything changes.

What did He do? He did that which must have seemed terribly strange to all who were present. He cried to the dead man with a loud voice, *“Lazarus, Come forth!”* What nonsense! If Lazarus had the power to come forth from the tomb, he would have walked out four days earlier. Had Mary or Martha, or any of the apostles cried, *“Lazarus, Come forth,”* he would have remained dead. No man’s voice is able to pierce the depths of the tomb; but here is a Man who is God. When He cries, *“Lazarus, Come forth,”* the same omnipotent lips that called a world into existence caused the grave to give up its victim, *“and he that was dead came forth!”* That is exactly how the Lord Jesus Christ saves chosen, redeemed sinners by His omnipotent mercy and irresistible grace. He calls them from death to life in the day of His power by a personal, particular, distinguishing call. — *“Lazarus, Come forth!”* His call of grace is an omnipotent, irresistible, effectual life-giving call. — *“And he that was dead came forth!”*

Death Compared to Sleep

But, between the time that he died and the time he came forth in resurrection life, our Savior tells us that Lazarus was sleeping. His body was sleeping in the earth in the arms of his Savior who loved him. The Lord Jesus announced that Lazarus was no longer in the land of the living, referring to his death as *“sleep.”* The Scriptures often speak of the death of believers, during that brief period between death and the resurrection, while the soul is separated from the body, as *“sleep.”* In the New Testament, this figure is only used with reference to believers (1 Corinthians 15:20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 5:10). This sleep refers not to some imaginary sleep of the soul, but to the sleep of the body in the earth. Let me show you seven things about this *“sleep.”*

Harmless

First, sleep is completely harmless. There is nothing fearful about sleep, but much for which to be thankful. Sleep is a friend, not a foe. So it is with death for every believer. David sang, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.”* Such ought to be the triumphant language of every child of God. The *“sting”* has been taken from death (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57). It has no more power to hurt the redeemed than a hornet has after its stinger has been extracted.

Relief

Second, sleep comes as a welcome relief after the sorrows and toils of the day. As the wise man declared, “*The sleep of a laboring man is sweet*” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Death for believers is simply the door through which we pass from this scene of sin and turmoil into the world of everlasting glory and bliss. 1st Corinthians 3:22 tells us, “*death*” is ours. Sleep is a merciful provision, greatly appreciated when it cannot be found. Equally merciful is death for one who is washed in the precious blood of Christ. How thankful I am that I shall soon “*sleep with Jesus,*” and that I will not live as long as Methuselah! — “*He giveth his beloved sleep*” (Psalm 127:2). What a promise! — “*I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety*” (Psalm 4:8).

Death is separation from the body. It must come. But it will be a welcome separation. It will be a separation from a troublesome and hateful companion. Richard Baxter said, “It is like taking off a shoe that hurts my foot. It will be a welcome relief.” To put this body aside will be like laying aside a worn out tool when all its work is done. It will be dismissing a servant when his service is ended.

This body has been my greatest enemy. As much as I have loved and over-loved it, I must leave this body of flesh to the grave. There it must lie and rot in darkness as a neglected and hateful thing. These eyes must see no more. These hands must move no more. These feet must walk no more. This tongue must speak no more. From the dust it came, and to the dust it must return; earth to earth, water to water, air to air, ashes to ashes. This is the fruit of sin. But, thank God, this body is only my shell, my tabernacle, my tent, my clothing, and not myself.

It has caused me pain, and toil, and sorrow. It has required my constant care and attention. I will be glad to put it aside. I know by long experience that this body of flesh has been a painful lodging for my soul.

When I am free of this body, I will be free from the bondage of corruption and the prison of sin (Romans 7:24). By reason of sin, this body has become mortal, beastly, and vile. We must learn to treat this body as a perishing thing. I do not mean that we should be reckless about our health. That would be a great evil. But I do mean that we spend too much time, care, and money pampering, soothing, and satisfying this body. Soon, very soon, it will rot in the grave. It is your soul that is important. — “*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, (for the comfort of his body) and lose his own soul?*” (See 1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Brief

Third, sleep is just for a short time. We lie down and soon rise again. Sleep is brief and gets more brief with the passing of years. We sleep for just a few hours snatched from the day. In the morning we awaken and rise to a new day. And death is but a brief sleep. Soon there shall be a morning of awakening and resurrection to a new day. — “*Them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*” (Daniel 12:2).

On the glorious resurrection morning, the dead in Christ shall be awakened, to sleep no more, but live forever throughout the perfect Day of God (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). — “*So shall we ever be with the Lord!*”

Rest

Fourth, sleep is a time of rest. The work of the day is exchanged for sweet repose of the night. This is what death means for God’s saints. — “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors*” (Revelation 14:13).

This applies only to the intermediate state, between death and resurrection, while our bodies sleep in the earth. When we receive our glorified bodies in the resurrection, there will be new ministries for us to engage in, for it is written, “*His servants shall serve him* (Revelation 22:3).

Shuts Out

Fifth, sleep shuts out the sorrows of life. In sleep we are mercifully unconscious of the things which trouble us and cause us pain, sorrow, and grief throughout the day. The sleep of night gives us welcome relief from that which troubles us by day. So it shall be in death. Those who are with Christ in Paradise know nothing of the tears which are shed on earth. Holy Scripture does seem to indicate that God’s saints in heaven are keenly aware of what is transpiring here. They are certainly made to rejoice when the salvation of sinners is heralded on high (Luke 15:7, 10). And they appear to be watching us in our race, aware of what we must face and overcome, but altogether without sorrow, fear, or tear (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Easily Awakened

Sixth, a sleeping man is easily awakened. Death is compared to a sleep to emphasize the ease with which the Lord will awaken our bodies. To raise the dead (impossible as it appears to the skeptic) will be simpler to Him than rousing a man from sleep. Nothing so quickly awakens one who is asleep as the voice of another, especially the voice of one who is dearly loved. So we are told “*the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth*” (John 5:28-29).

Preparation

Seventh, sleep is a time of preparation, a time when the body is fitted for the duties of tomorrow. When a man is awakened from sleep he arises refreshed and invigorated, and ready for what lies before him. In like manner, the resurrected believer will be endued with a new power. The limitations of his mortal body will no longer exist. That which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:40-49). What is “*a spiritual body*”? — I do not have a clue; and I doubt anyone else has a clue. But it seems obvious to me that it must be a body without the limitations with which we are now encumbered. Luther suggested that the resurrection body be as agile as thought. Augustine said in the resurrection body we will move to any place as soon as we will. Jerome Zanchius wrote, “As birds being hatched, do fly lightly up into the skies, which being eggs, were a heavy and slimy matter; so man, being hatched by the resurrection, is made pure and nimble, and able to mount up into the heavens.”

All who trust Christ alone as Savior and Lord have the assurance of God’s own Word that at that glorious day, when Christ shall come “*to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all that believe,*” they shall be found among the blessed “*dead which die in the Lord!*” Let us therefore await with holy joy and expectation the hour of God’s appointment, when by death the separation of soul and body shall take place. By this means, He makes us ready for the Christ’s coming, for His triumph and glory!

Are the personal triumphs of Christ to be manifested before the assembled creation of God in that day? — Is the dust of God’s saints the preparatory means for the greater display of Christ’s power and glory? — Does this temporary separation of my soul and body give occasion for my God and Savior to get glory by me? — If so, then it cannot be doubted that death is for us a blessing to be anticipated, not a curse to dread.

Surely salvation in Christ is worth living for; and the personal glory of Christ in raising me from the dust is worth dying for. May God give me grace, with increasing rapture of soul, to anticipate the time of my appointed departure. It shall be nothing more and nothing less than my body falling asleep in my Savior’s arms at night to be awakened by Him in His likeness in the morning!

Blessed Hope

No wonder the Apostle calls this our “*blessed hope!*” The fulfillment of it shall be eternally blessed beyond imagination. Christ will, at his second coming, “*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*” (Philippians 3:21).

I remind you again that the separation of body and soul is but a brief, temporary separation. The body sleeps in the Savior’s arms in the earth. And the soul lives during the time of separation in the unceasing enjoyment of His presence. But soon the morning of the resurrection shall come; and the Son of God “*shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God!*” Then there shall be a glorious reunion of soul and body, not for me only, not for you only, but for the whole election of grace. All the bodies of all the sleeping saints shall be raised at once, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! All shall at once be united to Christ, the glorious Head of the body, united forever to Christ and to each other, without the possibility of separation!

What will be the joy of the bride in that hour! What will be the triumphs of our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, when He shall come “*to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all that believe!*” Imagination fails to form the least idea of what must be the feeling in that reunion of soul and body. The two parts of self, separated in a moment of sorrow, bereavement, and death, shall meet and be forever united in the joy and glory of the Lord! The cold, clammy sweat of death on the body, in which the soul left it, shall be changed into all the warmth of life and immortality! The body, sunk in weakness, shall be raised in power! It was sown a natural body. It shall be raised a spiritual body! The soul shall come down from above with Christ and in the power of Christ, perfumed out of the ivory palaces; and the body shall rise to meet the soul, now through Christ changed from a vile body to a glorified body, as much prepared and as fully qualified for the everlasting enjoyment of Christ as the soul! That shall be what Paul calls “*the redemption of the purchased possession!*” Then Christ shall present us, body and soul, “*faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy!*”

He who redeemed my soul, at His own appointed time, regenerated my soul. And my body is no less precious to Him than my soul. He who redeemed my body as His purchased possession shall, at the Divinely appointed time, regenerate my body, too, with life everlasting (Romans 8:10-11). I pray that I will never have these thoughts far from my mind, that I may continually look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, crying to the Lord Jesus with his Bride of old, — “*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my Beloved, and be Thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether*” (Song 2:17).

No Hope

But O how vastly different that day shall be for you who are without Christ. If you die in your sins, if you die without Christ, after the death of your body, nothing awaits you but “*the second death,*” your everlasting separation from God in hell, among the torments of the damned! — No sweetness, just ever-increasing bitterness! — No rest, just ever-increasing toil! — Not blessedness, just ever-increasing cursedness! — No hope, just ever-increasing hopelessness!

Yes, you, too, shall be raised from the dead, but it will be unto “*the resurrection of damnation,*” not “*the resurrection of life.*” Your body will be raised only to suffer more acutely the eternal torments of the damned in the lake of fire. What an inconceivable, everlasting nightmare hell must be! — The thick darkness! — The undying worms! — The unquenchable fires! Oh, may God the Holy Spirit graciously give you life in Christ; may He graciously give you faith in the Son of God, and cause you to flee from the wrath to come! Seek the Lord while he may be found. There is no hope beyond the grave.

O Spirit of God, O Almighty God of all grace, O Blessed Savior, come, snatch chosen, redeemed sinners as brands from the burning, for the glory of your own grace!

Christ Our Resurrection

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26)

How important is the resurrection? Many seem to think it is irrelevant. But the fact is there is no aspect of Gospel doctrine that is more important than the resurrection. I live in hope of the resurrection. With Paul, I say, *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (1 Corinthians 15:19). In making that statement Paul does not mean that the believer’s life in this world is a sad, morbid life. The apostle certainly does not mean that it is really more delightful and pleasurable to live in this world without faith. And he does not mean that were it not for the hope of eternal glory, the people of God would prefer not live as they do in obedience and submission to our heavenly Father. God’s saints are not mercenaries. We do not serve our God for gain!

When Paul says, *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,”* he simply means this: — If there were no eternal life in Christ, no eternal bliss of life with Christ in glory, and no resurrection, then the believer would be the most miserably frustrated person in the world. We would never have that which we most earnestly desire. We would never see the end of our hope. We would never embrace Christ, or be embraced by Him. We would never see our Redeemer.

Such thoughts are unbearable. I cannot imagine anything more distressing than to be without Christ! Nothing could be more cruel and miserable than to live in hope of seeing Christ, being like Christ, and spending eternity with Christ, only to die like a dog! — *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”* What a horrible thought! What a tormenting supposition! But, bless God, it is not so.

Hope of Resurrection

We live in hope of the resurrection; and our hope is both sure and steadfast. — *“For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me”* (Job 19:25-27). In sickness we are calm, because we live in hope of the resurrection. In sorrow we are peaceful, because we live in hope of the resurrection. In trial and affliction we are at ease, because we live in hope of the resurrection. In bereavement we are confident, because we live in hope of the resurrection. And we hope to die in confidence and joy, because we live in hope of the resurrection.

Our assurance of the resurrection is much more than belief in a point of theological orthodoxy. It is a very personal thing, the most personal thing in the world. In fact, when we talk about the resurrection, we are not really talking about a doctrine, but about a person. When we think about the resurrection, we ought to be thinking about a person. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, our glorious Mediator is the Resurrection.

The blessed hope of the resurrection is not some fool’s philosophy. It is not a mere religious tranquilizer by which we are able to cope with the trials of life. This is the calm, confident assurance of believing hearts. It is the necessary, inevitable result of faith in Christ. That is what our Lord Jesus teaches us in these words: — *“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”* (John 11:25-26)

Representative Resurrection

We live in hope of the resurrection, *first*, because we have been resurrected in union with Christ representatively (Ephesians 2:5-6). While He lived on this earth, in obedience to God as our Representative, we lived in Him. When Christ died, all God's elect died in Him. And when He arose from the dead, taking his seat in heaven, we arose with Him, and have been seated with Him in glory (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Hail! sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song!
One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.

Nothing in all the world is more wondrous, more profound and more comforting than the teaching of Holy Scripture about our union with Christ. Union with Christ is the very heart of salvation. Union with Christ is central to everything revealed in Scripture. Without this union of our souls with Christ and the union of Christ with our souls, there is no salvation. Our union with Christ is an eternal union, secret and unknown to us until it is brought to light by the Gospel (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:9-11). Our union with Christ is a legal, representative union (Romans 5:12, 18-21). Our union with Christ is a living, vital union, a union made manifest when Christ is formed in us in the new birth (Colossians 1:27). And our union with Christ is an everlasting union of life and grace (John 17:22-23).

When the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the grave, He arose as our Representative. All that He has done and all that He has experienced, all of God's elect have done and experienced in Him, by virtue of our representative union with Him. His obedience to the law was our obedience (Romans 5:12, 18-21). His death as a penal sacrifice for sin was our death (Romans 6:6-7, 9-11; 7:4). — His death is our atonement!

Our Lord's resurrection was our resurrection. — This is our life! The resurrection of Christ is an indisputable fact of revelation and history upon which we rest our souls (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Disprove the resurrection and you disprove the Gospel. — *"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins"* (1 Corinthians 15:17). In 1st Corinthians 15 God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to mention six distinct appearances of the Lord Jesus. In all, the Scriptures record twelve separate times that the risen Lord appeared to His own. There may have been more appearances (Acts 1:3); but these twelve are recorded.

1. To Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).
2. To the women (Matthew 28:9-10).
3. To Cleopas and his companion (Luke 24:13-35).
4. To Simon (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5).
5. To the disciples, Thomas being absent (John 20:19-23).
6. To the disciples, Thomas being present (John 20:24-29).
7. To The Seven at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14).
8. To The Disciples on the mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20).
9. To The Five Hundred (1 Corinthians 15:6).
10. To James, the Lord's brother (1 Corinthians 15:7).
11. To the eleven disciples on Olivet, near Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-11; Luke 24:50-51).
12. To Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-7).

The bodily, physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ necessitates the resurrection of all who are in Christ. That which has been done for us mystically and representatively must be experienced by us personally. We are members of Christ's mystical body, the Church. If one member of the body were lost, the body would be maimed (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). If one member of the body were lost, the Head would not be complete (Ephesians 1:22-23). These bodies of ours must be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Philippians 3:21; John 17:24). The Lord Jesus was raised as the firstfruits of them that sleep (1 Corinthians 15:20). The full

harvest must follow! Christ is the Last Adam. As we have born the image of our first covenant head, we must bear the image of the second (1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 47-49). Our Redeemer, the Captain of our Salvation, has obtained the victory over all that could hinder the glorious resurrection of His people: sin, death, hell, the grave, and the devil (Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15). The covenant engagements of Christ as the Surety of God's elect are not complete until the hour of our resurrection (John 6:37-40).

Spiritual Resurrection

We live in hope of the resurrection, *first*, we were resurrected with Christ and in Christ representatively, when He arose from the dead. *Second*, we live in hope of the resurrection, because we have experienced the resurrection of Christ in regeneration. We know that Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, because we've been raised from the dead and Christ lives in us.

The new birth is nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. To be born again by the Spirit of God is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6; John 5:25; 11:25-26; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:9-15; 3:1-3).

Resurrection Hope

We live in hope of the resurrection, because we were resurrected with Christ representatively. — *Second*, we live in hope of the resurrection, because we have been raised from death to life in Christ spiritually, because we have experienced the resurrection. — And, *third*, we live in hope of the resurrection, because we believe the revelation of God concerning the resurrection (John 5:28-29). God's elect never die! There is a day coming in the which all that are in the grave shall be raised by the voice of the Son of God; and for all who trust the Lord Jesus Christ, it shall be a resurrection of life.

There shall be a resurrection of life at the second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 51-59; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Philippians 3:21). This will not be some secret rapture, but a glorious resurrection, a resurrection with and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Soon must this body die,
This mortal frame decay;
And, yes, my body must return
To ashes, air, and clay?

Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.

God my Redeemer lives! —
My Savior from the skies
Looks down, and watches all my dust,
Till He shall bid it rise.

Arrayed in glorious grace
My body then shall shine,
(United body, spirit, soul!),
In life by pow'r divine.

This blessed hope I owe
To Jesus' dying love.

My Life and Resurrection, too, —
I'll live with Christ above.

Dear Lord, accept the praise
Of this poor, mortal's song,
Till tunes of nobler sound I raise
With an immortal tongue!

Let us comfort one another with these words. And let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. — Our labor is not in vain in the Lord!

The Resurrection of the Damned

There shall also be a resurrection of damnation (John 5:29). The wicked and unbelieving shall be raised by the power of Christ, in order to be judged and condemned. The believer shall be raised by virtue of his union with Christ, in order to be judged worthy of and rewarded with everlasting glory. The wicked shall be raised in wrath. The believing shall be raised in love. The wicked shall be raised for execution. The righteous shall be raised for a wedding. — *"Prepare to meet thy God!"* Soon you and I will stand before the living God in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

Astonishing Love

“Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!” (John 11:36).

The tears of the Lord Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus produced such astonishment in the minds of the Jews who stood before the tomb, that they exclaimed, *“Behold, how He loved him!”* But had they known what every heaven-born sinner knows of the love of the Son of God, their astonishment would have been indescribably greater. Oh that we might know, with ever increasing astonishment, the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of the love of God that passes knowledge, the unquenchable love of God in Christ Jesus!

What a huge volume shall be read over in eternity of the Savior’s love to our souls! His distinct and distinguishing, express, personal, particular love! Truly, my Savior, *“Thy love is better than wine!”* We are astonished that the Son of God should ever even cast a glance in our direction, that the Holy One of Israel should choose to look upon us, but that He should love us; — that is utterly astonishing!

In eternity, seeing as we cannot now see, knowing as we cannot now know, as we look back over the days, and weeks, and months, and years of our lives, as we scan the ages of time and the wonders of providence, as the whole purpose and work of God is revealed to His creation, all creation shall look upon each chosen, redeemed sinner with astonishment, and we shall look upon ourselves with astonishment, and all the universe shall say of each saved sinner, — *“Behold, how He loved him!”*

We see sweet tokens and evidences of that love throughout our sojourn here, not only in His tears of sympathy, but in the precious blood that He so freely shed for us, and in all His manifold works of mercy and grace toward us, upon us, and in us. As often as we think of His love to us, we ought to cry with astonishment, *“Behold how he has loved us!”*

If we were in a right state of heart and mind, we would often remind one another how wondrously the Savior loves us. If we were in a better frame, our conversations with one another would often be taken up with this blessed subject. We waste far too much of our time upon trifles. How much better it would be if the Savior’s love so engrossed our thoughts that it became the constant theme of conversation with one another. What a blessing we would be to one another if whenever we met, we spoke of some sweet, blessed, fresh experience of the love of Christ that passes knowledge! Let’s talk less about sports and more about the Savior, less about politics and more about providence, less about business and more about blood, less about money and more about mercy, less about reveling and more about redemption, less about the recession and more about the Redeemer, less about the President and more about the King!

Soon, in that land beyond the river, when we are seated with the saints in light, we will want no other theme for conversation. There everything will serve to remind us how the Savior loves us. I want to simply remind you of the Savior’s astonishing love to our souls. Love is known best by its deeds. So, let me remind you of our great Savior’s great deeds of love, love deeds wrought for us and in us by our blessed Redeemer.

Suretyship

First, give a little thought to the great deeds of love our blessed Savior has performed for us from everlasting. When did Christ’s love begin to work for us? It was long before we were born, long before the world was created. — *“Behold, how He loved us!”* — Way, way back in eternity our Savior gave the first proof of His love to us by espousing and undertaking our cause as our blessed Surety. He beheld humanity as a palace that had been plundered and broken down. In the ruins of the palace, He saw every unclean thing. Who could restore the palace? Who could restore that which was lost? Who could build again that which was fallen? Who was there to undertake the great work of restoring that ruined palace? No one but the Word, who was with God, and who

was God. — *“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him.”*

Before the angels began to sing, or the sun, and moon, and stars cast out their first beams of light across primeval darkness, Christ the Lord stood forth to espouse the cause of His people, and pledged Himself not only to restore to us all the blessings that we would lose in the sin and fall of our father Adam, but also to add to them richer favors that could ever have been ours except through Him and in Him. Yes, from everlasting His delights were with the sons of men; and to everlasting His delights with His chosen shall continue.

When I think of the Son of God, in that far-distant past of which we cannot even form an idea, becoming *“the Head over all things to the Church,”* which then existed only in the mind of God and in union with Him, my very soul cries out in a rapture of delight, *“Behold how He loved us!”*

“Behold, how He loved us!” — In the secret, eternal councils of the triune God, the Lord Jesus Christ became the Representative and Surety of His chosen. The Son of God, knowing well all that His suretyship would involve, undertook to be the Surety for our souls, to fulfil all the covenant on our behalf, to meet all its demands for us. He swore to His own hurt, and (Blessed be His name forever!) He stuck to it (Psalm 15:4).

“Behold, how He loved us!” — In the covenant of grace, before the world began, the triune God gave His elect into the hands of Christ, as His righteous Servant. He trusted all His chosen sheep into the hands of the Good Shepherd. He gave Christ the charge of and charge over all things as our Surety (Ephesians 1:3-14). Yes, God the eternal Son covenanted to redeem all His elect, to keep them all by His grace, and to present them *“faultless”* before the presence of His Father’s glory with exceeding joy. Thus, as Jacob became accountable to Laban for the whole flock committed to his charge, the Lord Jesus Christ, *“that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,”* undertook to redeem and guard the whole flock entrusted to His care, so that when, at the last great muster, they should pass under the rod of Him that counts the sheep, not one of them would be missing. He and He alone became responsible for the sheep trusted to Him; and He and He alone shall have the praise of our everlasting salvation. In that great day the blessed Shepherd-Son-Surety, our dear Savior, will say to his Father, *“Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and not one of them is lost.”*

It was in the everlasting covenant that our Lord Jesus Christ became our Representative and Surety, and engaged on our behalf to fulfil all His Father’s will. As we think of this great mystery of mercy, surely all who are truly His must exclaim with grateful adoration, *“Behold how he loved us!”*

Incarnation

“Behold, how he loved us!” — In the fulness of time, our Lord Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven and took upon Himself our nature. We know so little of what the word *“heaven”* means that we cannot adequately appreciate the tremendous sacrifice that the Son of God made in order to become the Son of Man. The holy angels could understand far better than we can what their Lord and ours gave up when He, the Son of the Highest, stooped to be the Seed of women, to be born of a woman.

Yet, there were mysteries about the incarnation the angels of God could not fathom. As they followed the footprints of the Son of man on His wondrous way from the manger to the cross and to the tomb, they must often have been in utter astonishment (2 Corinthians 8:9). The matters of our redemption by Christ, Peter tells us, are *“things the angels desire to look into.”* And well they might! — *“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”* The omnipotent Creator took the nature of the creature into indissoluble union with His Divine nature. Marvel of marvels! — *“He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.”*

“Behold, how He loved us!” — O glorious Bridegroom of our hearts, there never was any other love like Yours! That the eternal Son of God should leave His Father’s side and stoop so low as to become one with us, so that as Paul declares, *“We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,”* is such a wonder of condescending grace and mercy that we can only exclaim again and again, *“Behold how He loved us!”*

Redemption

Then, *“being found in fashion as a man,”* He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, bearing all our sicknesses, and all our sufferings, and all our sins under the white hot fury of God’s holy wrath and justice! If you want to see the love of Christ, if you want to behold how He loved us, go to Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha! Go to Mt. Calvary. By faith gaze upon Him when He took upon Himself all the sins of all His elect, as Peter writes, *“who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.”*

The Lord God *“hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”* (Galatians 3:13-14). How could one who was so pure, so absolutely perfect ever bear so foul a load? How could He who knew no sin, did no sin, and could never sin be made sin? No mortal can conceive such a thing. Yet, bless His name, He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that He might die the Just for the unjust, and bring us to God by the sacrifice of Himself!

“Behold, how He loved us!” — *“The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all!”* — *“He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him!”* — In fulfillment of the great everlasting covenant of grace, and in prospect of all the glory and blessing that would follow from Christ’s atoning sacrifice, *“it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief.”* We cannot have the slightest conception of what that bruising and that grief must have been, when the Son was forsaken by the Father! We cannot imagine what our Lord’s physical and mental agonies must have been. Yet they were only the shell of His sufferings. His soul-agony was that which made Him cry, *“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* Then it was that the precious *“corn of wheat”* fell into the ground and died, and dying, brought forth *“much fruit,”* of which heaven and eternity alone can tell the full tale. — *“Behold how He loved us!”*

Joint-heirs

Still, there is more. The Lord Jesus Christ has so completely given Himself to us that all that He has is ours. The Spirit of God declares that we are *“heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.”* He is the glorious Husband, and His Church is His Bride, the Lamb’s Wife; and there is nothing that He has which is not also hers even now, and shall be hers to eternity. He possesses nothing that is not ours forever! By a marriage bond which cannot be broken, *“for He hateth putting away,”* the Son of God has espoused His chosen bride unto Himself in righteousness and in truth; and she shall be one with Him throughout eternity.

He has gone up to His Father’s house to take possession of the many mansions there, not for Himself, but for His people. His intercessory prayer is, *“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: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.”* — *“Behold how He loved us!”*

Preservation

Think often upon the Lord’s dealings with us in the days of our unregeneracy. Oh, how He loved us! How persevering is the love of Christ! He called us again and again, but we would not come to Him. The more

lovingly He called us, the more resolutely we hardened our hearts and refused Him. With some of us, this refusal lasted for years; and we wonder now that the Lord waited for us so long. Yet, He waits to be gracious to the objects of His everlasting love. — *“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”* (Isaiah 30:18). Not only did our Savior persevere in His love, enduring our insults. All the days of our rebellion, while we passionately pursued our adulterous lovers, He provided for us, protected us, hedged us about, and passionately pursued us. That is what is pictured for us by His prophet in Hosea 1-3.

Regeneration

At last, the blessed Savior, conquered us by His grace, made us partakers of His own Divine nature in regeneration, and came to us as He comes not to the world, to live in us and dwell in us, one in living union with us! Many days have passed since then, and I ask you now to recall what Christ has done to us since we first trusted in Him. Has His love for you cooled in the slightest degree? We have all tried that love by our wonderings and our waywardness; but we have not quenched it; and its fire still burns just as vehemently as at the first.

We sometimes fall so low that our hearts are like adamant, incapable of emotion. Yet, the Lord Jesus loves us still, and forsakes us not. We are like the insensible grass which calls not for the dew, yet the dew of His love gently falls upon us and refreshes our souls. He endures our indifference. He bears with our provocations. He forgives all our transgressions. Though our hearts are as ice toward Him, His heart burns with love for us. Though we shut the door against Him, he puts His hand in by the hole of the door and draws our hearts to Himself. Oh, — *“Behold how He has loved us!”*

Unquenchable

We who are God’s are all monuments to the unquenchable love of God our Savior.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Song of Songs 8:5-7).

What a description this is of the love of Christ, the *“love that passeth knowledge!”* It is Christ who speaks in verse 5, *“I raised thee up under the apple tree.”* And it is Christ who says, *“I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.”* It is God our Savior who declares, *“I drew them with cords of love, and with the bands of a man.”* He found us in a desert land, and in a waste howling wilderness. *“Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.”*

The Lord Jesus here declares His love to His church, and she replies, *“Set me as a seal,”* not only on Your heart, but also on Your arm — the place of Your love and the place of Your strength — the place of the most tender emotion and deepest passion, and the place of power, safety, and work.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? His love is invincible and irresistible as death. It is a jealous love, as unyielding and unalterable as the grave. It is comparable to fire, coals of fire, the very flame of Jehovah.

Here, then, is the love of Christ! Its breadth, length, height, and depth are absolutely immeasurable. Our Savior’s love is unquenchable love. No other love is really unquenchable, but our Savior’s love is. His love is

eternal and everlasting, immutable and unalterable. The love of Christ is infinitely beyond that of a father or a mother, or a brother or a sister, or a husband or a wife. The love of Christ is the one and only love that passes knowledge; the one love that nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is able to extinguish or cool; the one love whose dimensions are beyond all measure (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Our Redeemer's love is here compared to fire that cannot be quenched. As such, it is affirmed that "waters," "many waters" cannot quench it. Christ's love for us is a thing of life which the floods cannot drown (Psalm 69:15, 93:3).

The waters of shame and suffering sought to quench and drown it. They would have hindered its out flowing, and come (like Peter) between the Savior and the cross; but His love refused to be quenched on its way to Calvary. Herein was love! It leaped over all the barriers in its way. It refused to be extinguished or drowned. Its fire would not be quenched. Its life could not be drowned.

The waters of death sought to quench it. The waves and billows of death went over the great Lover of our souls. The grave sought to cool or quench His love; but it proved itself stronger than death. Neither death nor the grave could alter or weaken His love for us. It came out of both death and the grave as strong as before. Love defied death, and overcame it.

The waters of our unworthiness could not quench nor drown the love of Christ for our souls. Love is usually attracted to that which is loveable. When something ugly, unlovely, unattractive comes, love (as it is called) withdraws from its object. Not so here. All our unfitness and unloveableness could not quench or drown the love of Christ. It clings to the unlovely, and refuses to be torn away.

The waters of our long rejection sought to quench it. I repeat myself; but the repetition is needed. Is it not? How soon we forget! Though the Gospel showed us that personal unworthiness could not arrest the love of Christ, we continued to reject Him and His love. We continued to hate Him and despise His love. Yet, His love for us rose above our enmity to Him, rose above our unbelief and survived our hardness. In spite of everything we are and have done, His love was unquenched.

Though He has saved us by His matchless grace, the waters of our daily inconsistency seek to quench his love; but, blessed be His name, without success! Even after experiencing His adorable grace, we are constantly spurning His unspurnable love! What inconsistencies, coldness, lukewarmness, unbelief, worldliness, hardness, and utter ungodliness daily rushes out of us against the Savior's love, like a mighty flood to quench its fire and drown its life! Yet it survives all; it remains unquenched, unquenchable, and unchanged!

All these infinite evils in us are like "waters," "many waters," like "floods," torrents of sin, waves and billows of evil, all constantly laboring to quench and drown the love of Christ! They would annihilate any other love, any love less than His. But our Savior's love is unchangeable and everlasting. — "*Behold, how He loved us!*"

When the Jews saw our Lord weeping at Lazarus' tomb, they were astonished. To them, His tears were an evidence of special love. But to us, the great token of our Lord's special love is His shed blood (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:9-11). It might well be said of each blood-bought believer, "*Behold how He loved him!*" Child of God, Jesus Christ, your Lord, loves you eternally. There never was a time when He did not love you. His love for His own is without beginning and without end. It is eternal. The Son of God loves his own peculiarly. The love God has for His own elect is a special, particular, family love, a love He has for none but His own. He loved Jacob, but hated Esau. So it is. So it ever has been. So it ever shall be.

The Lord loves his people perseveringly. Though we sinned in Adam, were born in sin, and lived in sin by deliberate choice, His love for us was never broken. Though we sin still after experiencing His grace, His

love does not cease or grow cold. His love is patient, longsuffering, lasting, and enduring. God will never cease to love those whom He has always loved. His love is immutable. Our Savior loves us sacrificially. — *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.”* He so loved us that He voluntarily laid down His life in our place. So mighty is His love that, when He knew the price of our souls was His own precious blood, He willingly poured out His life’s blood to redeem us!

The Lord Jesus Christ loves all of His people savingly. The love of Christ for us is much more than a wishful emotion. He so loves His own that he desires their salvation. And what He desires He has the power and wisdom to accomplish. His love is not helpless, but powerful. He will not stand idly by and allow one soul whom He loves to perish, when he has the power to save that soul! Such love as that might suit a cruel monster; but it is not the love of our God.

And the Lord Jesus Christ loves his people satisfyingly. His love will be satisfied. He will never lose the object of His love. Hosea’s love did at last conquer Gomer’s heart. And the love of Christ will in the end conquer the hearts of all His elect. — *“Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.”* This special, free, and sovereign love of Christ’s will satisfy all His people. He will give us all that we can need or desire for all of eternity. He will withhold no good thing from His own. In that great day which is yet to come, God’s creation will stand back in awe and wonder and say, concerning His redeemed people, — **“BEHOLD HOW HE LOVED THEM!”**

Bow down, O my soul, while pondering the wondrous love of Christ and the rich, boundless mercy and grace that love fetches to me in free salvation, and give all the praise and all the glory to Him alone. His love and His free grace, not my merit, is the sole cause of all. After experiencing such distinguishing, free mercy, grace, and love, how increasingly astonishing it is that all my repeated and aggravating transgressions have not extinguished this love toward me. Rather, He loves me still, just as He did from the beginning! — Oh love unequalled, love past finding out! When shall this base, this shameful heart of mine so love You as to live to Your glory, O Lord Jesus? What love is Thine! What vileness is mine!

Truly, it must be said of God our Savior, He is love; and without Him we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13). The more we meditate upon His great love to us, its character, its fullness, its blessedness, the more our hearts are compelled to acknowledge, *“We love Him because He first loved us.”*

Sovereignty and Instrumentality

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.” (John 11:39)

“Salvation is of the Lord!” — Salvation is the work of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. From start to finish, salvation is by grace alone. This is the message we preach to all men. You cannot save yourself. You cannot contribute anything to the work of salvation. And you cannot keep yourself saved. No preacher can save you. No church can save you. No religious system can save you. No priest can save you. No ceremony can save you. God alone can save you. Salvation is by God’s grace alone.

Salvation originates with the sovereign will of God the Father. — *“It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy”* (Romans 9:16). Salvation, as it is revealed in the Bible, begins with election, predestination, and the covenant of grace ordered in all things and sure. Salvation was earned and purchased for God’s elect by the obedience and death of God the Son as the sinner’s Substitute, our covenant Surety. — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).” Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to save His people from their sin; and He did what He came to do. The Son of God has saved His people. He brought in an everlasting righteousness for us. He obtained eternal redemption for us. And He entered into heaven as our Forerunner to claim the prize of eternal glory for us. And salvation is effectually applied to chosen, redeemed sinners by the irresistible grace, omnipotent mercy, and sovereign power of God the Holy Spirit. — *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). The Holy Spirit of God calls sinners from death to life, creating in those whom He calls repentance toward God and faith in Christ. He seals to our hearts all the blessings of God’s grace, and seals us in grace forever, so that those who are born of God can never perish.

If today you trust Christ, if you are a child of God, it is not because of your will and work, but because of God’s will and work. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because God the Father chose you, God the Son redeemed you, and God the Spirit gave you faith in Christ. — *“Salvation is of the Lord!”*

Our Responsibility

There lies Lazarus in the tomb. He is dead, helplessly dead. It is obvious to any sane man that Lazarus could do nothing to change his condition. He is dead! His sisters, though they loved him dearly, could do nothing to help him. All the disciples standing by could not breathe life into his body, or call back the departed spirit of their friend, Lazarus. Dust had already begun to return to dust again. His body had already begun to decay. But the Lord Jesus was there. He was about to perform a great miracle. Soon the voice of God who created Lazarus would be heard, speaking with life-giving power, *“Lazarus, come forth!”* And this dead man would begin to live again. But, before our Lord would perform this great miracle, which only He could perform, He required His disciples to do something. — *“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.”* Isn’t that strange? No, not really.

Without question, He who by the mere power of His word can cause the dead to live could have removed the stone from the mouth of the tomb with great ease. But He chose to use His disciples. He gave them a work to do, which was essential to the resurrection of Lazarus, essential because He required it. The removal of that stone could not give life to Lazarus. Only God can give life to the dead. But the Lord would not raise Lazarus from the dead until His disciples took the stone away.

When *“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone,”* at first the disciples hesitated. Human reason got in the way. Martha said, *“Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days”* (v. 39). Human reason will have either human instrumentality or Divine sovereignty, but not both. God’s Word teaches both. Our Lord

gently corrected Martha's unbelief (v. 40). "*Then they took away the stone*" (v. 41). When they rolled away the stone, those disciples demonstrated three things...

1. Submissive obedience to the will and Word of their Lord.
2. Faith in Christ's power to raise the dead (v. 40).
3. An anticipation of Lazarus' resurrection for the glory of God.

There are some things that you and I must do for the salvation of God's elect. We look to Christ alone as the Giver of Life and the Savior of men. But we do not fold our arms in indifference and say, "God will save His elect no matter what." That which we can do we must do. We must look for opportunities to be instruments in the hands of God for the salvation of sinners. Wouldn't you like to have been the one who rolled away that stone from Lazarus' tomb that day? Well, we cannot go back to Lazarus' tomb. But there are many like Lazarus around us who are dead in sin. And you and I can do some things to help them. There are some stones for us to take away!

A Word for the Dead

Here is a word for the dead. Fallen sinners are in the same condition spiritually Lazarus was in physically. They are spiritually dead; but spiritual death is no excuse for neglect, indifference, or even unbelief. Poor, lost sinners are dead spiritually and legally. Yet, all are both physically and morally alive and responsible. And there are some things dead sinners can and must do. Dead in sin, fallen, depraved men and women cannot save themselves, redeem themselves, put away their sins, or give themselves life. But there are some things sinners can do. And what you can do you must do.

Was the Ethiopian Eunuch dead in sin? He certainly was. Yet, he did not neglect his soul. He did what he could (Acts 8:26-39). That Ethiopian Eunuch bought a Bible and began to read it. You can do that, too. That African earnestly sought the Lord. You can do that, too. He went up to the place where the Lord promised to reveal Himself (Matthew. 18:20). It was a long, costly, dangerous journey. But he was in trouble. He was a sinner in need of a Savior. So he made the trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. Though he did not find the Savior at first, he was not discouraged. When he left Jerusalem, he was still seeking the Lord. He was reading Isaiah 53. He did not seek to know the mysteries of Scripture, or the deep doctrines of the Bible. He was seeking a Person! No doubt, he prayed much. And while he was seeking the Lord, God sent him a Gospel preacher! What mercy! — He heard! — He believed! — He was baptized! — "*He went on his way rejoicing!*"

He walked in the light God gave him, did what he knew he could do and had to do; and God gave him more light. If you care for your soul, seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near. — "*The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him!*" (Lamentations 3:25). — "*Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door will open. Ask and it shall be given to you.*" — There are no exceptions. If you seek the Lord, He will save you. If you do not seek Him, you will not find Him.

It is true, the Lord God declares, "*I am found of them that sought me not*" (Isaiah 65:1). Yes, it is true that the Holy Spirit searches for the lost coin; and the good Shepherd seeks His lost sheep. But that prodigal son must return to his Father's house. You must seek the Lord. — "*Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*" (Ephesians 5:14). — Without question, if you seek the Lord, it is because He is seeking you; but seek Him you must (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

"I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true,
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;

I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,—
‘Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovedst me.”

A Word for the Preacher

Second, here is a word for the preacher. As a Gospel preacher, as the servant of God in this world, there are some things every Gospel preacher can and must do for the souls of men. I know that whenever God is pleased to save a sinner, He sends a Gospel preacher to the sinner He is determined to save to proclaim the Gospel of His grace. We do not exalt the ministry of the Gospel into a popish priesthood. But we dare not despise it as a needless thing. The preaching of the Gospel is essential to the salvation of God’s elect, because, “*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:13-17). Spurgeon once said, “We cannot turn dry bones into living men, but we can prophesy upon them, and, blessed be God, we can also prophesy to the four winds, and so by our means the dead may live.”

Not everyone can or should preach. God has not called and gifted all of His people to be preachers. But he has called and gifted some for the work. It is the responsibility of all who are called and gifted of God for this blessed work to give themselves whole-heartedly and conscientiously to the work of preaching the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). They must be diligent in study and preparation, diligently seek God’s message in prayer, and avail themselves of every means and opportunity to preach the Gospel to this generation.

There is a work to be done for the souls of men before they are converted. Before Lazarus was raised from the dead, our Lord required those who were standing by to take the stone away from his tomb. God’s servants have no power to make dead sinners live. But we are responsible to remove the stones which have been laid over their tombs. Like those men who were sent out to clear all debris from the road leading to the City of Refuge, Gospel preachers must “*Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God*” (Isaiah 40:3). The Lord God commands us, “*Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people*” (Isaiah 57:14).

Some do not come to Christ because the huge stone of ignorance prevents them. There are some things you must know in order to trust Christ. You cannot trust an unknown Savior. Therefore, we are sent to preach the Gospel that men may know who Christ is, what He accomplished as our Substitute, and how He saves sinners by His almighty grace. Many others do not come to Christ because they have been entombed beneath the heavy stone of religious error. They are blinded by false religion and the doctrines of men. Therefore, a faithful Gospel preacher must continually combat and expose religious error. And some do not come to Christ because Satan holds them under the heavy, black stone of despair. — There is no cause for any sinner to despair of grace. Grace is free and unconditional. — “*Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37).

There is much to be done for sinners before they believe; and there is much that must be done by God’s servant for people after they believe. — Before they are converted, the Lord’s word to His servants is, “*Take ye away the stone.*” Once the dead are given life, His word is, “*Loose him, and let him go*” (v. 44). Christ’s word to his servant is, “*Feed my lambs*” (Jeremiah 3:15; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

Young plants in the vineyard must be tenderly watered and nurtured. Newborn babes must be fed the sincere milk of the Word. The children of God must be brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And

the men of grace must be fed with strong meat. New converts must be set free from religious tradition, the grave clothes of legalism, and the oppressive care of the world, as well as the chains of sin. God's children must be fed and nurtured and cared for, so that they may enjoy the freedom of fellowship with Christ and His people. This loosing of God's people is a life-long process. It requires the constant, faithful, loving, and knowledgeable ministry of the Gospel. Gospel preachers are ascension gifts of Christ to His Church, given to lead sinners to Christ, instruct saints in faith, establish churches in doctrine, guide pilgrims in their sojourn, comfort believers in their troubles, and protect God's sheep in their pasture.

A Word for the Believer

Third, here is a word for the believer. There are some things you who are saved by the grace of God can and must do for the souls of men (See Mark 2:1-5). Perhaps God has not called you to preach. You are not gifted, perhaps, for that work. But God has given you a sphere of influence with some, and gifted you with the ability to do some things that no one else can do.— That which God has given you the ability to do and the opportunity to do you must do.

You can do for the unbelieving what Mary and Martha did for their dead brother. — You can call upon the Master on their behalf.

“Brethren, see poor sinners round you,
Slumbering on the brink of woe.
Death is coming, hell is moving,
Can you bear to let them go?”

As God gives you opportunity, you can tell what you know (John 9:11). You can tell your friends, relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances what you have seen, heard, felt, and experienced of the grace of God in Christ. — “*What great things God hath done unto thee!*” You can use what God has given you for the support of the Gospel ministry (3 John 5-8). You can make a decided effort to distribute tracts, tapes, CDs, DVDs, bulletins, books, and articles to the people you come into contact with. You can work to prepare a place for others to hear the Gospel. You can find a way to bring men and women with you to hear the Gospel of Christ. And you can exemplify the grace of God in your life before the people of this world.

A Word for Us All

Fourth, here is a word for us all. That which we can do, before God, we are responsible to do (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Necessity is laid upon me. I must preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). We are under the constraint of Christ's grace and love; we must be His witness (John 20:21). What are you doing for the glory of Christ and the souls of men? Be your own judge in this matter. Men and women are perishing for lack of knowledge. I see zeal and enthusiasm for everything in this world, except for the Gospel of Christ. How very sad! The time is short. Dedicate yourself to the Master's work. Throw yourself into it today!

Seeing the Glory of God

“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”
(John 11:40)

That which is the only thing worth seeing, that which will fill and gladden the soul when it is seen and known, that in comparison with which all other sights are nothing is *“the glory of God.”* That which righteous men of old desired to see, but saw only in brief, shadowy glimpses, that for which Moses prayed in the tabernacle, when he saw the Lord face to face, that for which we who believe most earnestly and constantly pray, that without which our longing hearts can never be satisfied is *“the glory of God.”* That which everything in heaven and earth is intended to reveal, that which our eyes were made to behold and which our minds were formed to appreciate, that for which sin was allowed to come into the world that it might be expelled by righteousness, and for which death came to be succeeded by everlasting life, that for which the Son of God came into the world, lived, died, and rose again to reveal is *“the glory of God.”*

At the Tomb

Our Lord Jesus is standing before the tomb of Lazarus with his sisters, Martha and Mary. It appears that Martha questioned both the Savior’s wisdom and His power. She seems to have questioned the Lord’s wisdom in providence, because He had not come sooner to prevent her brother’s death (v. 21). And she seems to have questioned His power and ability to raise Lazarus from the dead (v. 39). Without question, Martha was a believer. She was loved of God and born of God. But, like us, she was weak, faltering, and failing. She struggled with unbelief. She looked at her present situation; and circumstances told her that Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, was beyond hope. She had grace to believe for the future. She said, *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (v. 24). But she did not trust Christ for the present. She walked by sight, not by faith. She acted according to reason, not revelation.

Then, *“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”* The only thing preventing Martha from seeing the glory of God on this occasion was her unbelief. Our Lord said, *“If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.”* These words were not spoken for Martha’s sake alone. They were not intended to reprove and instruct Martha alone. They are recorded for our learning and admonition as well. This is what the Lord Jesus says to you and me, — *“If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.”*

In another place our Lord says, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* But here the Savior is not speaking of seeing God Himself, but rather of seeing the glory of God. He is talking about the revelation of that which is in God. Horatius Bonar said, our Lord is talking about seeing “some display of the invisible excellencies that are in Him.” The glory of God is that which shows Him to be the glorious Being that He is. It is through the knowledge of His glory, through seeing His glory, that we reach the knowledge of God Himself. — *“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).

The glory of God is spread out before us in all His wonderful works. It is revealed in creation’s handiwork. — *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament showeth His handiwork”* (Psalm 19:1). It is written out plainly in the Book of Holy Scripture. It is embodied in Christ, the incarnate Son, who is the image of the invisible God and the brightness of His glory. And it is the glory of God, above all else, that is proclaimed in the Gospel of His grace.

The glory of God is the thing we desire. That is the thing we long to see, and must see. We who believe have dedicated our hearts, our lives, and all that we possess to the glory of God. Every time we bow our heads

in prayer, both in private and in public, our hearts cry out for a manifestation of God's glory. Why then do we see so very little of the glory of our God? — The only thing that keeps us from seeing the glory of God is our own unbelief. Here is the high, high honor that God our Savior puts upon faith in Himself. He says, — *"If thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God!"*

God's Purpose

First, let us understand that it is God's purpose to reveal His glory. The supreme, ultimate purpose of God in creation, providence, redemption, and grace is to reveal Himself and to show forth His glory. The prophet Isaiah says, *"So didst Thou lead Thy people, to make Thyself a glorious name"* (Isaiah 63:14). For His own sake and for our sake, God is pleased to manifest His glory. God reveals Himself and shows forth His glory for His own name's sake, so that He might receive the honor and praise that rightfully belongs to Him from all his wonderful works. And God reveals Himself and shows forth His glory for our sakes as well, so that we might know and enjoy Him as God.

Particularly, in John 11:40, our Lord Jesus speaks of God's glory being seen in bringing life out of death. It was for this cause that Christ came into the world, that He might reveal the glory of God in abolishing death by His own death on the cross. Christ came to remove the penalty of sin which is death, to undo the work which death had done, to destroy him which had the power of death, to swallow up death in victory. This work of redemption is altogether the work of God's free grace. And its accomplishment is a marvelous manifestation of His glory.

Even God's strange work, His acts of judgment, is designed of God to show forth His greatness and His glory. — *"For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth"* (Romans 9:17). Vessels of wrath, made unto dishonor, shall show forth the glory of the great Potter and serve His purpose, just as fully as the vessels of mercy *"which He had afore prepared unto glory"* (Romans 9:21-24).

Everything in God's creation is designed, ordained, brought to pass, and ruled by God in His total sovereignty to glorify Himself, and to reveal His glory to His creatures. Nothing happens by chance. Everything, the bad as well as the good, is sovereignly ruled by God for the glory of His own great name. This is plainly the doctrine of Holy Scripture. — *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain"* (Psalm 76:10). — *"The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil"* (Proverbs 16:4). — *"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen"* (Romans 11:36). — *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created"* (Revelation 4:11). — It is the purpose of God to reveal His glory in all things. To that end He ordained all things, made all things, and rules all things.

Mediator's Desire

Secondly, the Scriptures reveal that it is the desire of the one Mediator between God and men, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Substitute, the God-man our Savior, that we see the glory of God (John 1:18). Sin has hidden God's glory from fallen man. Christ Jesus came to unveil the Father's face, to make known the Father's character, to manifest the Father's glory. — *"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 was the errand upon which Christ came. It is true He came to save His people from their sins. But His purpose in saving us was that He might reveal the glory of God, that God might be glorified in us and by us (John 12:27-28; 17:1, 4; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14, 2:7).

The Lord Jesus seeks our eternal blessedness; and He knows that our blessedness is to be found in beholding the glory of God. What are we without this glory? We are nothing. Our existence is meaningless,

vain, and empty. We are like a world without a sun, a bee without a hive, or a well without water. Will you not look to Christ and behold the glory of God? The Son of God delights to show sinners the glory of God. It was for this purpose that He came into the world, lived in righteousness, died in agony, and rose again in triumph. Will you not turn and behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that in beholding Him, your soul may be filled with heavenly light and gladness?

To say that Christ desires the salvation of sinners, the holiness of His elect, and the comfort of His saints is to say much. But to say that He desires to make known to men the glory of God is to say much more. To say this is to declare that the Son of God desires and delights in men beholding that which, as soon as it is beheld, will bring life, gladness, holiness, and comfort to your heart and soul. When the Lord Jesus says, "*Come unto Me and I will give you rest,*" His meaning is, "Come unto Me and I will show you that which will immediately cause you to rest." When He says, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink,*" His meaning is, "Come unto Me, and I will show you that which is more refreshing to your soul than a fountain of water to a thirsty man."

Our Unbelief

We have seen that it is the purpose of God in all things to reveal His glory. The Word of God makes that fact crystal clear. And the Book of God shows us plainly that Christ Jesus, the Mediator, desires for men and women to see and know and enjoy the glory of God. Why is it, then, that so few see the glory of God, and that those few see so little of God's glory? To answer that question, let me show you a *third* fact, plainly revealed in the Word of God. — It is our unbelief, only our unbelief that keeps us from seeing the glory of God.

This is the reproof given in our text. — Our Lord Jesus said, "*If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.*" The one, singular evil about which our Lord complained most often while He was upon the earth was unbelief. He found wretched unbelief not only in the Pharisees and the common people of the world, but also among His own disciples. They were slow of heart to believe God! How often they shut both their eyes and stopped both their ears against the wonders performed in their midst and spoken in their presence by the Son of God! They would not believe the message of free-grace, redeeming love, and eternal life! They would not believe, therefore, they could not see the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ!

But we must not be too quick or severe in our judgment regarding those early disciples. That which was their shame and crime is ours as well. How slow we are to believe our God! And, like Israel in the wilderness, like Martha, like those before whom the incarnate God walked upon the earth, it is our unbelief that keeps us from seeing the glory of God today. It is unbelief alone that keeps sinners from Christ. It is unbelief alone that keeps God's saints from enjoying the privileges that are ours in Christ. It is unbelief alone that keeps redeemed, regenerate sinners from the joy of full assurance. It is unbelief alone that keeps God's children from that peace that passes understanding. It is unbelief alone that keeps you and me from enjoying the fulfilment of God's promises.

Matthew Henry said, "Unbelief is at the bottom of all our staggerings at God's promises." Robert Traill wrote, "A great many believers walk upon the promises at God's call in the way to heaven even as a child upon weak ice, which they are afraid will crack under them and leave them in the depth." John Calvin tells us, "Our own unbelief is the only impediment which prevents God from satisfying us largely and bountifully with all good things." It is unbelief that prevents our minds from soaring into the celestial city and walking by faith with God across the golden streets. Oh, wretched, sinful, shameful unbelief! God grant us grace to overcome this weakness and infirmity of the flesh.

It is unbelief that hinders Christ from performing those works in our midst which would show us the glory of God. That is an incredible statement, contrary to all human reason. I would not dare think of making such a statement, were it not for one thing. It is plainly given in the Word of God. Can a child's hand smother

the sun? Can a withered leaf, fallen into a mighty river, stop its flow, or dry up its waters? Can the breath of a man extinguish the stars of heaven? Of course not! Yet, the Word of God plainly informs us that unbelief prevents Christ from performing His mighty works in our midst, by which the glory of God might be seen. — Matthew tells us that when the Lord Jesus “*was come into His country...He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief*” (13:58). — Mark uses much stronger language, telling us, “*He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them, and He marveled because of their unbelief*” (6:5-6).

The hand of God is not prevented from working in our midst by our unworthiness, or by the multitude of our sins, or by our inability, but only by our unbelief. What wonders God might perform for us, among us, in us, and with us if we would simply take Him at his word! It was unbelief that prevented the Son of God from performing His mighty works in Galilee. Unbelief lays hold of Christ’s hand, and says, “*Work not here!*” Unbelief despises the grace and power of God and says, “*Depart out of our coasts,*”

It is unbelief that prevents us from seeing the glory of God in His works, even though they are wrought before our very eyes. Christ’s hand is not always stayed by man’s unbelief. Thank God for that! Where He wills to work, He will work. Man’s will cannot overthrow His will. And man’s unbelief cannot frustrate, nullify or even alter God’s eternal purpose. Very frequently the Lord Jesus did work the works of God, works in which the glory of God was evidently revealed before the eyes of unbelieving men. Multitudes saw the works performed by the Lord Jesus; but, because of their unbelief, they could not see the glory of God in those works. They saw the healing of the leper, but did not see the glory of God in the leper’s healing. They saw the opening of the blind man’s eyes, the unstopping of deaf ears, the giving of feet to the lame, the casting out of devils and even the resurrections of Jarius’ daughter and of the widow’s son; but they did not see the glory of God in these things. They no more saw the glory of God in the works of Christ than they did in Christ himself. Even after Lazarus was raised from the dead, some who saw that mighty miracle did not see the glory of God in the miracle (John 11:43-46).

In John 6 there were five thousand men, not counting the women and children, who were fed with five barley loaves and two small fish. It is estimated that at least twenty thousand people were fed that day. A mighty miracle was performed. Those people ate the bread and the fish. They both saw the miracle and partook of its benefits. But they did not see the glory of God in it all. They ate from the hand of Him who is the Bread of Life and knew it not. They followed the Master for a while, because of the abundance of loaves and fish He gave them. But they saw nothing glorious in Him, or in His works. The glorious God was standing before them; but they could not see Him. And the Lord told them plainly, “*Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles,*” that is to say, not because you saw the glory of God in the miracles I have performed, “*but because ye did eat the loaves, and were filled*” (John 6:26).

The glory that is wrapped up in God’s works can be perceived only by faith. Faith draws aside the veil. Faith sees the glory of God in His works, for faith sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Faith eats the Bread of Life and drinks from the Fountain of Living Water, and is refreshed by the abundance of grace, which all of Christ’s miracles portrayed. The charismatic looks for and sees nothing but carnal miracles; and Satan gives him his desire. The believer sees in every miracle performed by Christ a picture of God’s grace; and in that grace he sees the glory of God. We do not look for carnal signs of grace, which is what the miracles were. We have the Word of grace; and believing the Word of grace, we see the glory of God in all His works of grace.

Unbelief keeps us from enjoying the glory of God even after we have in some measure seen it. The Lord’s disciples saw the glory of God in His wondrous works. Yet, after all they had seen, heard, and experienced, they realized very little. The glory of God seems to have been seen by them at intervals, in glimpses, but not continually. Like men with a telescope at their side, sometimes using it to look far beyond the scope of natural vision, and sometimes not using it at all, these disciples seem to have exercised great faith at

times, and virtually no faith at other times. There was more unbelief in their history than faith. They had faith enough to show them something. But their unbelief kept much more hidden from them. They entered but little into the glory which they acknowledged and at times enjoyed.

How much like those disciples we are! Like Martha, we have seen the glory of God in Christ yesterday. And we have hope of seeing more tomorrow. But for today, where is the faith by which to see the glory of God? We have seen the glory of God in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our eyes rest upon Him who is the glory of God. But, oh, how faintly do we behold Him! And the reason is our shame. We see but little of the glory of God, because we believe but little. Unbelief is the thing that grieved our Lord. Unbelief is what He reproves in us more than anything else. Unbelief dishonors God, quenches the work of the Spirit, and keeps us from usefulness for the glory of God and the souls of men.

But our dear Savior's words in John 11:40 are much more than a reproof. The Lord Jesus is calling us to faith. — "*Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" He is saying, "Have faith in God. Only believe. Be not faithless, but believing. Trust God in everything and for everything. Even in the most trying circumstances, say, '*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*'"

Faith honors God, and God honors faith! He always has and he always will. Ask Job (Job 1:20-23; 2:9-10; 42:10). Ask Noah (Genesis 7:23). Ask Abraham (Genesis 22:8, 13-14; Romans 4:20-22). Ask Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1). Ask Naomi (Ruth 4:14-15). Ask David (1 Samuel 17:45-51). Ask the Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:14-16). Faith honors God, and God honors faith!

Believe and See

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God. Martha and Mary were placed in hard, trying circumstances. Their beloved brother was dead. What could they hope might be done? Had the Lord arrived earlier, they might have hoped that He would have healed Lazarus. But it appeared that He had arrived too late. Lazarus was dead. They comforted themselves with the hope of the great resurrection. But for the present, Martha was full of despair. Then the Lord spoke to Martha, saying, "*Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" It is as much as if He had said, — "Martha, Martha, if you would just trust Me, I would do for you far greater things than you could ever think or ask. If you would but trust Me, there is nothing I would not do for you, no length to which I would not go, no limit to the power I would exercise on your behalf to show you the glory of God."

And He says the same thing to you and me. Child of God, you may be enduring some great trial right now. But your trial is no greater than Abraham's, when he was called to offer up his son, Isaac. If he believed and staggered not, if he hoped against hope and was strong in faith, giving God the glory, why should we not do the same? Are we the children of Abraham, to whom the "*God of glory*" appeared? Is it not reasonable for our Lord, who is always faithful to us, to expect faith from us? After all He has done, can we be hesitating, fearful, and distrustful? God forbid! This is His promise: — "*If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.*"

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God in salvation by Christ our Substitute (Exodus 33:18-23). The glory of God can be seen only by those who are standing upon the mount of sacrifice, looking through the blood of Christ slain upon the cursed tree (Romans 3:24-26). In the cross of Christ, in His death as the sinner's Substitute, I see the glory of God. There "*mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*" (Psalm 85:10). We see the glory of God most fully in the substitutionary sacrifice and sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus Christ, because in His death all the glorious attributes of God are plainly revealed: His sovereignty and His grace, His righteousness and His goodness, His inflexible justice and His pardoning mercy, His unmitigated wrath and His everlasting love (Exodus 33:19, 34:5-7).

If you will believe on the Lord Jesus, you will see the glory of God in the sacrifice of his Son. But if you believe not, you never can. Reason may see the doctrine of the cross; but only faith can see the glory of the cross. Only faith can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God in His wise and good providence (Romans 8:28; 11:36). If Martha had believed, she would have seen the glory of God in Lazarus' sickness and death and in her own grief as well. All things are of God; but only faith can see the glory of God in all things. How adorable His providence is! But only faith sees the glory of God in providence.

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God in the works He performs in our midst. God's glory is seen in His works. And faith perceives both His work and His glory in his work. God's glory is to be seen in what He has done, in what He is doing, and in what He shall do.

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God in the fulfilling of His promise. — *“Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified”* (Isaiah 43:26). I wonder how much spiritual blessedness we miss simply because we do not believe God. Because we insist upon having much goods laid up for many years, we miss the blessedness of seeing God raining manna from heaven, giving us each day our daily bread.

If we would believe, we would see the glory of God in His resurrection power (John 5:25-29). I know that God works in total sovereignty. He depends upon us for nothing. His work depends upon us for nothing. But I know this also: — God works in His sovereignty by the faith of His people (Ezekiel 36:33-38). I take Ezekiel's prophecy to mean that if we would but believe God, we would see His glory in spiritual resurrections, we would see God save His elect. Yes, God will save all His elect, when and where it pleases Him. But I am certain that in the Church of God we lack for conversions only because we lack faith. It is written, — *“When Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.”* And if we believe, we shall see the glory of God in the resurrection of our bodies at the last day (Job 19:25-26).

God's Gift

Fifth, be sure you understand that faith to behold the glory of God is itself the gift of God's grace and a work in which His glory is to be seen (Ephesians 1:19; 2:8; Colossians 2:10-12). We believe only by the working of God's mighty power in us, only by the gift of His grace. If you now believe God, it is by that very same power that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead; it is by the creative, resurrection, omnipotent power of the omnipotent God! Yet, our Lord Jesus declares, *“If thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God!”* Believe God! Believe and you shall see the glory of God (Mark 9:23-24).

Faith is the gift of grace alone,
My God, how can it be
That You should choose, in saving love,
To give that gift to me?

Faith owes its birth to sovereign grace,
And lives beneath the throne,
Where grace maintains her dwelling place
And reigns supreme alone!

A sinner saved by sovereign grace,
My praise I cannot hold:
Hail, sovereign, free, unchanging grace!
“Salvation's of the LORD!”

Substitution
Christ in My Place

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all *men* will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. 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. Then 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, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with His disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that He will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where He were, He should shew *it*, that they might take Him.”

(John 11:47-57)

How hard, how desperately wicked, how utterly depraved the heart of man is! A mighty miracle had been wrought just a short distance from Jerusalem. A man who had been dead for four days was raised to life in the sight of many witnesses. The fact was unmistakable, and could not be denied. Yet, the chief priests and Pharisees and the multitudes under their influence would not believe. They shut their eyes and stopped their ears. Fearful of losing their ecclesiastical power, they would not bow to God's revelation. Rather than bowing to Christ, they “*took counsel to put Him to death.*”

Read this passage again, and behold the insanity with which men reason when they set themselves against God. These elated fools reasoned that the only way they could preserve their nation was to destroy Christ, His church and His Gospel. They rushed madly down the path they chose; and the very thing they feared came to pass. In just a few short years, the Roman armies did come, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and carried away the whole nation into captivity.

The religious hypocrites held before us in this passage clearly exemplify the fact that lost people, with hearts full of sin, with hearts completely filled with hatred for God, often love religion, religious traditions, and religious ceremonies. Here is a great multitude (v. 55), plotting to murder the Lord Jesus, meticulously purifying themselves for the observance of the passover!

“*The Jews' passover was nigh at hand...Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, — What think ye, that He will not come to the feast?*” — He will, indeed, come. He created the world for this hour. Before this feast was ended, Christ our Passover would be sacrificed for us. The subject presented to us here is Substitution. I want to show you from the Word of God what substitution is, and show you the efficacy of Christ's substitutionary work.

One Subject

The Bible is a book with one subject, and that subject is Substitution. The singular theme of the Holy Scripture is the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which He obtained eternal redemption for His elect and secured the everlasting salvation of His people. The one purpose and object of the Word of God is to reveal the glory of Christ in the performance and accomplishment of His great substitutionary work. If you miss, or fail to

understand the Gospel message of Substitution, you cannot understand anything written upon the pages of inspiration.

I know that the Bible teaches us many blessed truths. I love to study and preach Bible doctrine. I am not embarrassed or uneasy when someone refers to me as a “doctrinal preacher.” If I were not a preacher of Gospel doctrine, I would not pretend to be a preacher. But all the blessed doctrines of the sacred Volume may be summed up and set forth in one doctrine — Substitution. No truth of Holy Scripture, no part of the Bible can be understood apart from the doctrine of Substitution.

The very first doctrine of the Bible, the doctrine of creation, can be understood properly only when we realize that all things were created by the Lord Jesus Christ, our Substitute. The doctrine of Divine providence is a precious truth of Holy Scripture. We rejoice to “*know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called, according to His purpose.*” But providence can only be understood when we realize that all things are upheld and governed by the word and power of Christ our Substitute. We believe the glorious doctrines of eternal election and sovereign predestination. And we are not at all bashful about proclaiming them. But election is in Christ. We were chosen in the Substitute. Predestination is that we should be conformed to the image of the Son of God, our Substitute. How we rejoice and glory in the doctrine of the atonement! But if there were no Substitute, no Mediator between God and man, if there was no one who could satisfy the needs of fallen man and the justice of a holy God, if there were no suitable Substitute, there would be no atonement. The doctrines of the resurrection and the glorification of the saints cause our hearts great joy before God. This is the glorious expectation of the sons of God. But we would have no hope of future glory, if there were no Substitute into whose likeness we must be made.

The theme of the Bible is Substitution. The whole purpose of Divine Revelation is to teach us that God will not speak to, nor will He be spoken to by any man, apart from a Substitute. God only deals with men through a Substitute. Your eternal salvation, or your eternal damnation will be determined by your relationship to God’s appointed Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything in the Bible sets forth Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the incarnate God-man as the one, the only, the all-sufficient Substitute for sinners (Luke 24:44-47).

Sinner’s Hope

Substitution is the sinner’s only hope. The substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only hope we have, the only hope God’s elect have ever had, and the only hope sinners ever shall have. In the Old Testament Church God’s elect believed on and trusted that Substitute who was to come, the One promised, prophesied, and pictured in the Old Testament Scriptures, and were redeemed and justified, forgiven and accepted in their Substitute, “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Genesis 3:15; 4:1-4; 22:8-14; Exodus 12:13; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:24; 12:10; Malachi 4:1-2; ; Luke 2:25; John 1:29; Acts 10:43).

As the Church of the Old Testament had but one foundation upon which to rest their hope before God, so today we have no hope of acceptance with God but this, — “*In due time Christ died for the ungodly.*” In both the Old Testament era and in this Gospel era, the Christ we trust, the Substitute by whom we are redeemed is Christ, “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,*” whose “*works were finished from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8; Hebrews 4:3).

The Book of God makes it perfectly clear that the only hope any sinner has of eternal salvation is Substitution. Our only hope of acceptance with God is through the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every ritual, every garment of the priesthood, every sacrifice, every article of furniture within the tabernacle, the tabernacle itself, all the laws of the Old Testament, the temple, the temple service, and all the prophets of God, all have but one message, and they all speak it very plainly. Their message is Substitution and that is the message of every man called and sent of God to preach the Gospel. Substitution means “Christ in My Place.”

A Substitute Is

You know what a substitute is. A substitute is one who stands in the place of another. A substitute assumes the obligations and responsibilities of another person. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, as our Substitute. The Son of God assumed our nature and took upon Himself the sins of God's elect. He stood in the place of sinners at Calvary so that all who trust Him might stand in His place eternally accepted before God. Since I fully trust my soul upon the merits of Christ and Him alone, resting my soul upon Him for everything before God, I have good reason to believe that Jesus Christ is my Substitute. I want to tell you about Christ my Substitute. I want to show you how that He has stood, is standing, and shall forever stand in my place before God. I want you to know, trust, love and worship my glorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinners' Substitute.

A Perfect Substitute

Who is our Substitute? (John 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:16; 6:14-16). His name is Immanuel, — "*God with us.*" The sinners' Substitute must be a real man; and He must be the infinite God. Were He only God, He could not suffer. Were He only man, He could not satisfy. But the God-man can both suffer and satisfy.

And the Substitute must be perfect (Leviticus 22:21). In Leviticus 21 and 22, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron with the most vital and fundamental information on how to approach and worship Him. The high priest must have no defect, deformity or blemish of any kind (Leviticus 21:16-21). And the sacrifice must have no blemish at all (Leviticus 22:17-24). If the priest had no defect, but brought a sacrifice with blemishes it would not be accepted, for it "*must be perfect to be accepted*" (Leviticus 22:21). Likewise, if the sacrifice had no blemish, but the priest who offered it had any blemish, the sacrifice would not be accepted at all, for it "*must be perfect to be accepted.*"

The purpose of those ancient Levitical laws was to declare the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the ceremonial pictures of the law. Christ is our perfect, great High Priest without spot, blemish, defect, deformity or sin (Hebrews 4:14-15; 7:26; 8:1). And He is the perfect Sacrifice. He is the Lamb without blemish and without spot (John 1:29; 1 Peter. 1:18-20). It is only through the Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious sacrifice that we could be and are justified from all sin (Acts 13:38-39; Hebrews 9:12).

In the Lord Jesus Christ every believer is a priest with no blemish, no sin (Revelation 1:5-6; 5:9-10). In Christ's precious blood atonement we approach the throne of grace with boldness (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22), because we have a perfect sacrifice that fully, eternally satisfies the holy justice of God (Romans. 3:24-26; Colossians 1:19-22; Jude 1:24-25).

It is in, by, through, and with Christ our Substitute, the perfect Priest and perfect Sacrifice, that we meet God's standard of perfection. — "*It must be perfect to be accepted.*" And this is all "*To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved*" (Ephesians 1:6).

Savior's Mission

Why did our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, come into this world? What was His purpose in coming? What was His mission? He said that He came to do His Father's will. He said that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, taking upon Himself our nature, so that He might do that which was committed to Him by His Father in the covenant of grace before the world began. Christ came to redeem unto Himself a people and to glorify His Father in doing so. — "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (1 Timothy 1:15). In order for God, in His infinite holiness, to save fallen, guilty sinners, God's own Son must

become the sinners' Substitute. Righteousness must be established. Sin must be punished. Justice must be maintained and satisfied. Christ assumed our nature and came into this world so that God might be both just and the Justifier of His people.

Mission Accomplished

What did the Lord Jesus Christ accomplish while He was in this world? He brought in an everlasting righteousness. He satisfied the law and justice of God. He put away all the sins of His people. He redeemed a people unto Himself (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:12; 10:10-14).

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year. For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:1-14)

Substitute Accepted

Where is Christ Now? (Hebrews 1:1-3). Yonder, beyond the skies, I see Him, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as our Substitute. Our great Substitute has finished the work of redemption; and now He is reigning as the exalted Monarch of the universe, performing the final salvation of those people for whom He died, the sinners He has redeemed with His own precious blood. The sovereign Ruler of this universe is that one who suffered and bled and died as the sinners' Substitute! (Isaiah 53:10-12; John 17:2).

Eternal Substitute

The Lord Jesus Christ stood as our Substitute in eternity past as our Surety in the everlasting Covenant of Grace. Christ is an eternal Substitute. It is always smart to begin in the beginning. And if you want to know what the Book of God teaches about salvation, you've got to understand that it is a work finished from eternity in our Substitute. By God's own oath in the counsels of eternity, “*Jesus was made a Surety of a better testament*” (Hebrews 7:22). Before I was a sinner, Christ stood as my Savior. Before I broke God's law, Christ stood as my Redeemer. Before I was a transgressor, Christ stood as my Righteousness. Before I fell in Adam, I was accepted in Christ my Substitute. Before I became a slave, Christ stood as my Ransom. Before I became a debtor, Christ stood as my Surety.

From everlasting, the God of Glory said, concerning His elect, — “*I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” In the Covenant of Grace the salvation of God's elect was planned, purposed, provided for, made sure, and completely accomplished (2 Samuel 23:5; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:9). All the blessings of the Covenant and all of God's elect were entrusted to the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety of the Covenant (John 6:39; Ephesians 1:13). He voluntarily took upon Himself all responsibility for us, just as Judah became surety for Benjamin and assumed all responsibility for Benjamin (Genesis 43:8-9). With Christ standing

as our Substitute and Surety, in the mind and purpose of God, our salvation was from eternity a thing already complete. In very plain, unmistakable words, God the Holy Spirit declares that the whole work was done in Christ before the world began (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 4:3). Christ, the Lamb of God, was slain as our Substitute before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). We were “*accepted in the Beloved*”, our Substitute, from eternity (Ephesians 1:6). God has always looked upon His elect in Christ, the Substitute, and always will!

Obedient Substitute

Christ is an eternal Substitute. He stood in our place and we were in Him from eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ is our obedient Substitute. He stood as our Substitute while He lived in this world. For thirty-three years the Lord Jesus Christ lived as the Federal Head and Representative of His people in this world. It is written, — “*By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous*” (Romans 5:19). As we were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam, we were made righteous by the obedience of Christ. In the course of His earthly life the Lord Jesus Christ restored that which He took not away — Righteousness.

Understand this, — the sinless life of Christ was as necessary for our redemption and salvation as His death at Calvary. In His life Christ fulfilled the holy law of God as our Substitute, establishing perfect righteousness (Romans 3:22), without which we could never be accepted before God. By His life of obedience, He brought in an everlasting righteousness for us. His name is, Jehovah-tsidkenu, “*The Lord our Righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6). Our Lord voluntarily submitted Himself to every law and ordinance of God to fulfil all righteousness as our Representative. All that Christ did in His life, He did as our Substitute. His righteousness is imputed to us because it is ours. All who are represented by Him, all for whom He obeyed the law as their Substitute, obeyed the law in Him. We often say, “It is just as though we did it.” And that is true; but there’s more to this than a “just as though.” — The Book of God reveals a real Substitute and real substitution (compare Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16). God demands that we fulfill the law in perfect righteousness; and we who believe have fulfilled the law of God in our Substitute (Romans 3:28-31; 8:3-4).

Crucified Substitute

First, Christ is an eternal Substitute. He stood in our place, and we were in Him from eternity. *Second*, the Lord Jesus Christ is our obedient Substitute. He stood as our Substitute while He lived in this world. *Third*, The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stood in our place as our Substitute at Calvary. He is our crucified, sin-atonement Substitute.

Our dear Christ died under the penalty of God’s law, bearing our sin, our shame, our guilt, and the wrath of God due unto us. He died in our place, satisfying the wrath of God for us, so that we (God’s elect, the objects of His everlasting love) would never be required to die. — That is Substitution; and that is the doctrine of Holy Scripture (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:4-8; Psalm 40:12; 69:3-6, 9, 19-20).

Child of God, when you think of the redemptive work of Christ, remember these four facts, rejoice in them, and let nothing move you from them.

1. The death of Christ was a vicarious sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:21).
2. The death of Christ was for a particular people. — “*For the transgression of My people was He stricken*” (Isaiah 53:8). — “*The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.*”
3. The death of Christ was an effectual satisfaction of justice, an effectual atonement, an effectual redemption. — “*By His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (Hebrews 9:12). Christ has put away all the sins of all His people. The Lord Jesus has redeemed God’s elect. Our Substitute has silenced the claims of God’s law against us, by fully satisfying it. Our great Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, has justified, perfectly and completely, all of those people for whom He died as a Substitute.

4. And the death of Christ was final. — “*Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Hebrews 9:26).

Present Substitute

But there is more. — Our Lord Jesus is an eternal Substitute. He is an obedient Substitute. He is a crucified, sin-atoning Substitute. And, blessed be His name, our dear Savior is a present Substitute! See Him yonder in Glory. — Jesus Christ the righteous stands in our place today as our Substitute and Advocate with the Father in heaven (1 John 2:1-2). His five precious wounds, the merit of His righteousness and the merit of His blood effectually secure the present and eternal welfare of His people. God will not charge His own elect with sin; and the law cannot require any punishment of God’s elect because of sin, because Christ, the risen Lord, our Substitute, stands as our Advocate with the Father. Child of God, do not sin! But when you do sin, do not despair! Our Advocate on high holds up His hands, as often as His child sins, and He says, “Father, do not charge My redeemed one with sin. I paid the price for His iniquity, transgression, and sin. See, here are the wounds.”

God will never charge His people with sin for four reasons. In Christ we cease to be accountable for sin, because...

1. God Himself has accepted our Substitute (Hebrews 6:20; 10:12).
2. Our Substitute is perfectly righteous, “*Jesus Christ, the Righteous.*”
3. Our Advocate has made satisfaction for our sin. — “*He is the propitiation for our sins.*”
4. In Christ we have no sin. Christ has taken our sins away! — “*Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin*” (1 John 3:5).

Judgment Substitute

First, Christ is an eternal Substitute. He stood in our place and we were in Him from eternity. — *Second*, the Lord Jesus Christ is our obedient Substitute. He stood as our Substitute while He lived in this world. — *Third*, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stood in our place as our Substitute at Calvary. He is our crucified, sin-atoning Substitute. *Fourth*, Jesus Christ the righteous stands in our place today as our Substitute and Advocate in heaven. He is our present Substitute. And, *fifth*, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will stand in our place, as our Substitute before the bar of the thrice holy Lord God on the Day of Judgment.

In that great day, when God judges all men, Christ will present all of His people, even you, even me, holy, unblameable, unproveable, and perfect before the glorious majesty of the Triune God, saying, “*Behold I and the children which God hath given me*” (Hebrews 2:13; Ephesians 5:27; Jude 24-25). When God examines us with the omniscient eye of His strict justice, truth, and holiness, He will find no spot or blemish in us, because His own Son performed in our place, as our Substitute, perfect righteousness and obedience and thoroughly washed away our sins in His blood (Jeremiah 50:20).

Trusting Christ as my Substitute, I fully expect to hear God say, “*This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*” And looking upon me in His Son, my Substitute, I fully expect to hear Him say to me, “*Well done, Thou good and faithful servant; Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*”

Come, poor, guilty, helpless sinner! Come, you who are dirty, corrupt, bankrupt sinners, come to Christ. Trust your soul upon the merits of the Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ; and, like the publican of old, find free, full, perfect justification in the Christ of God.

Child of God, how this Gospel message of Substitution ought to inspire our hearts with love for, praise to, adoration of, and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Divine Substitute, the one who is, was, and shall forever be in our place!

“Six Days Before the Passover”

“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.” (John 12:1-11)

May God the Holy Spirit, whose Word we have before us, graciously take the things of Christ and apply them to our hearts as only He can. As we open our Bibles to the 12th chapter of John’s Gospel, we come to the end of our Lord’s public earthly ministry. Everything else recorded in John’s Gospel, until His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, tells us about our Savior’s private instructions given to His beloved disciples during the last six days of His life on this earth.

John 12 is really a climactic chapter. For three years, without wavering, the Lord Jesus had declared and proved His manifold perfections. He had manifested His blessed person in public and private; and He had verified every claim He ever made as the Son of Man by His words, by His deeds, and by His behavior. And the result among His own disciples was a deepening knowledge of Him. They began to see and appreciate more fully who He really is. Then, after the climactic resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, His chosen, the sheep of His fold, had a more confident awareness that this is indeed the Son of God. Yet, the unbelieving were more completely hardened in their unbelief. The very same things that had in those three years melted the hearts of God’s elect only hardened the Lord’s enemies; and their hatred intensified with every passing day (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Blessed Company

The event described in the passage before us is recorded no less than three times in the Gospel narratives of our Lord’s earthly life. Obviously, the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn much from it and meditate often upon it. *First*, we have a sweet picture of the blessed company of the redeemed (vv. 1-3).

“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”

With the observance of this passover, the legal, Old Testament ordinance ceased forever. The passover here mentioned was the fourth during our Lord’s earthly ministry. The Lord Jesus was looking forward to it with peculiar delight. He was anxious to eat it with His disciples before His death (Luke 22:15), because He was anxious to fulfil His Father’s will and complete His covenant engagements as our Surety, anxious to finish the mission for which He had come into the world, — anxious to save His people from their sins! With the

celebration of this passover, the ordinance of it was to cease forever, because Christ our Passover was about to be sacrificed for us. Once the substance came, the shadow died away (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Colossians 2:16-17).

Six days before the final passover our Lord Jesus came again to Bethany, the town of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They made a special supper for Him. Martha, who was always a busy, active woman, served the Lord and the guests. Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, sat at the table with Christ and the others. Then, we read in verse 3 that Mary, whom we saw sitting at the Savior's feet and hearing His Word in Luke 10, took a pound of very costly and fragrant ointment, anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair. When she did, the house was literally filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

We read in verse 2 that "*They made Him a supper.*" That is what we should seek to do every time we come together in His house, every time we gather our families to pray, and every time we enter into our closets. O Holy Spirit, make it so. Public worship (and private), gathering together in His name, more than anything else, is to gather for His honor, to make Him a feast (Song of Solomon 1:7, 13). If we make Him a feast, He will come in and sup with our souls (Revelation 3:20; Song of Solomon 5:2)

Here are three things, three great features, which ought to characterize every believer and every Gospel church...

1. Communion with Christ, as portrayed in Lazarus sitting at the table with the Savior.
2. Worship, as portrayed by Mary anointing His feet.
3. And service to Christ and His people, portrayed in Martha serving the table.

The work was harmonious: no envy and no self-exaltation. Each were in their place. The workers were one. — "*They made Him a supper.*" How blessed God's Church is when the Holy Ghost gives us grace so to serve our Savior! Let us ever seek grace to do so (Philippians 2:1-5, 14-18).

Lazarus at the Table

John just casually mentions the fact that Lazarus, whose body just a few days earlier was rotting in the tomb, was sitting at the table with the Lord Jesus, his family, and friends, and a good many neighbors, including the chief priests and Pharisees. So the second thing we see here is the fact that our Savior's wondrous works are as undeniable as they are unexplainable. — There sat Lazarus!

No one could pretend that his resurrection was a mere optical delusion, and that the eyes of the bystanders must have been deceived by a spirit or vision. There sat Lazarus, in the flesh, eating and drinking and talking with other men.

The very same things are true with regard to our Savior's resurrection from the dead. Was Lazarus seen by the people of Bethany, going in and coming out among them? So was the Lord Jesus. Did Lazarus eat food before the eyes of his friends? So did the Lord Jesus eat and drink before His ascension.

We should mark this and remember it in this age of abounding unbelief and skepticism. Our Lord's resurrection will bear any weight we can lay upon it. Just as He placed beyond reasonable doubt the resurrection of Lazarus, so He placed beyond doubt His own victory over the grave. If we believe that Lazarus rose again, we need not doubt that the Lord Jesus rose again also. If we believe that Christ rose from the dead, we need not doubt that He raised Lazarus from the dead, and will raise us from the dead. All of our Savior's wondrous works are both undeniable and unexplainable (His Incarnation — His Sinless, Perfect Obedience — His Supernatural, Substitutionary Death — His Resurrection — His Ascension).

Mary's Anointing

Next, John gives a brief description of Mary's very instructive act of anointing the Savior's feet. — "*Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment*" (v. 3).

There are several things that are both striking and instructive here. When we consider who Christ is, we ought to be overwhelmed at His wonderful condescension in allowing this woman to anoint and bathe His feet! You and I who are His should be astounded that He condescends to allow us to serve Him (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). When we realize who Mary was, (Luke 7:37) what a great privilege this was for her! This was an act of great love and devotion, displayed in extraordinary, sacrificial generosity. Mary poured out "*a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly.*" It was worth 300 pence, about a year's wages (Matthew 20:2). Love never counts the cost. Love never weighs the consequence. Love never considers a loss a loss when the loss is made for the one who is loved.

This was an act of great humility. Mary wiped the blessed Savior's feet with her hair. The whole thing was motivated and inspired by gratitude. The Lord Jesus had just raised her brother from the dead. Though it was a spontaneous act of love, this sacrifice and anointing required thoughtful, deliberate preparation. Our Master tells us here that Mary had specifically kept this precious ointment for this occasion. And Mary did this thing without calling any attention to herself. C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "Silent acts of love have musical voices in the ears of Jesus. Sound no trumpet before thee, or Jesus will take warning and be gone." Mary's love and gratitude produced her humility and generosity. To whom much is given and forgiven, the same will give, forgive, and love much (Luke 7:47).

This anointing of our Lord Jesus by Mary is also a beautiful picture of Gospel preaching. The Word of God is a casket, a treasure chest, containing the costly spikenard of Christ crucified. The Gospel preacher breaks open the casket and pours out the spikenard. And the sweet odor of Christ crucified fills the house.

Mary's Opposition

In verses 4-6 we are told that Judas Iscariot, who had no love for Christ, but rather was a hypocrite and a covetous person, said, "*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?*" Judas did not care for the poor. He was interested in money and material things. What he really had in mind was that Mary should sell the ointment and give the money to him as the treasurer of the twelve. Of course, he could not suggest his real thoughts; so he tried to impress the Lord and the others with his piety and concern for the poor.

So the *fourth* thing we see in this passage is the fact that anyone who seeks the honor of Christ and seeks to serve the interest of His honor will meet with opposition, often in the most unsuspected places. Mary anointed the feet of our Lord with precious ointment and wiped them with the hair of her head. The ointment was not poured out with a niggardly hand. She did it so liberally and profusely that "*the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.*" She did it under the influence of a heart full of love and gratitude. She thought nothing too great and good to bestow on such a great Savior. Sitting at His feet in days gone by, and hearing His words, she had found peace for her conscience and pardon for her sins. At this very moment she saw Lazarus, alive and well, sitting by her Master's side, — her own brother, Lazarus, whom he brought back to her from the grave. Greatly loved, she thought she could not show too much love in return. Having freely received, she freely gave.

But there were some present who found fault with her conduct and charged her with wasteful extravagance. Judas led the charge; but all the other apostles joined his opposition of Mary and her devotion. Judas was of so great esteem and authority among them, that what he did they are all said to do. So cunningly he had carried his conspiracy, that they all suspected themselves rather than Judas; each said, "*Is it I?*"

Many, like Judas, who have no interest in the cause of Christ, except in pretense and show, openly oppose true devotion at every opportunity. Sadly, many truly faithful disciples are influenced by them and follow their lead. We must never allow ourselves to be moved from “*patient continuance in well-doing*” by such people.

Mary’s Defender

Fifth, in verses 7 and 8 the Lord Jesus comes to Mary’s defense. Our God has promised, them “*that honor Me I will honor;*” and he is as good as his word. — “*Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always*” (vv. 7-8).

Mary often sat at His feet and heard His words. She listened much and said little. She knew that His death was near; and she took this opportunity to anoint Him for that day, fearing that once the Pharisees laid hold on Him, she would not be able to anoint Him (Matthew 26:12; Mark 14:6-9).

Mary believed the Word of God which she saw fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. In a day when few understood His doctrine, Mary believed, and believing, she understood. Faith is simply trusting Christ, taking God at his Word, believing Him. That faith which stands in the word of man is not faith at all. True faith stands in the Word of God alone. Our Lord Jesus told His disciples that He must die and rise again. Mary simply believed Him, and came as a poor, broken-hearted, forgiven sinner to anoint Him for His burial. Where does your faith stand? What is the basis of your faith? Is it your feeling? Your experience? Or, is it the Word of God?

Faith believes the Word of God (1 John 5:7-12). The basis of our faith is the Word of God, and the Word of God alone. I fully agree with Martin Luther who wrote...

“Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving.
My warrant is the Word of God;
Naught else is worth believing!”

With David, I say, “*My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy word.*” — “*Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy word.*” — “*Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope.*” — “*I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope*” (Psalm 119:81, 114, 49; 130:5). Our feelings are no basis for hope. Our hope is in that which God has caused to be written in Holy Scripture. If I have “*a good hope through grace,*” I ought to be able to turn to some text, or fact, or doctrine of God’s Word as the source and basis of it. Our confidence must arise from something that God has said in His Word, that we have received and believed with our hearts. — “*The heart is deceitful above all things*” (Jeremiah 17:9). — “*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*” (Proverbs 28:26). Good feelings are deceiving, unless we can point to “*Thus saith the LORD*” as the basis of our hope. Our hope is found in, arises from, and is based upon the Book of God. — “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). The Book of God was written specifically to give believing sinners an assured hope of grace, salvation, and eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord (1 John 5:1-3).

The basis of hope is the Word of God. And that which is revealed in the Word of God which gives us hope is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Substitute (Romans 8:34-35; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Christ is the Foundation upon which we are built. — “*Christ is our Hope*” (1 Timothy 1:1). — We “*hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). — “*The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him*” (Lamentations 3:24). — Our hope is in Christ, our Covenant Surety, our blessed, sin-atonement Redeemer, our Righteousness, and our Advocate and High Priest in heaven. — “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*” (2 Timothy 1:12).

The basis of our hope is the Word of God. That which is revealed in this Book that gives us hope is the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want you to see that the good hope of grace and salvation that God gives to His elect is something that is felt in us, felt inwardly in our hearts. The Apostle Paul speaks of God's saints as people "*rejoicing in hope*" (Romans 12:12). We read in Romans 5:5, "*Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*"

The Lord Jesus undertook Mary's cause, came to her defense, and held her up as an example of faith and devotion. I say with David, "*Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me*" (Psalm 31:2), — "*Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me*" (Psalm 35:1), and with the prophet, — "*O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me*" (Isaiah 38:14). — "*I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause*" (Job 5:8). — "*Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to Thy word*" (Psalm 119:154).

In verse 8 the Savior says, "There will always be poor people in the church and in the world for you to take care of and provide for; but I will not be with you very long in the flesh, and you will not have these opportunities to show your love and devotion to Me so directly." However, in these days He tells us that what we do for others in the His name is done unto Him (Matthew 25:34-40). We should never forget that, and ever look for opportunities to serve the spiritual and eternal, and physical and emotional needs of others.

Desperate Hardness

Sixth, in verses 9-11 we see what desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man. — "*Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead.*"

Multitudes who came to Jerusalem for the passover journeyed to Bethany, which was only two miles from Jerusalem. It was reported that the Lord Jesus was there; but they came to Bethany not so much to see Christ as to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. How dull and dark is the understanding of the natural man, who is more interested in the curious than in the Creator, more interested in Lazarus than in the One who gave him life!

Here, again, we are reminded that while miracles are a witness of the Deity and power of Christ, they do not beget saving faith. Faith is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon and wrought in the hearts of sinners by the preaching of the Gospel (Luke 16:29-31). While it is said that many of these people believed, they were like those in John 2:23-25, who were impressed by the miracles He performed (John 12:37-40).

The chief priests were not impressed, but rather angered because of the notoriety that Jesus had received, and because the people were flocking to Him. They took counsel that they might not only put Christ to death, but Lazarus too. — "*But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus*" (vv. 10-11). Their hearts were totally hardened. They wanted to murder the Son of God and erase every trace of His ministry from the face of the earth. They wanted to murder Lazarus because Lazarus' very existence was a witness to Christ as Savior, Lord, and Messiah, and exposed them as pretentious, religious hypocrites.

What hardness of heart possessed Judas Iscariot! An apostle and a preacher of the kingdom of heaven, Judas proved himself to be both a thief and a traitor. So long as the world stands, that reprobate man will stand as a lasting proof of the depth of human corruption. That anyone could follow Christ as a disciple for three years, see all His miracles, hear all His doctrine, receive at His hand repeated kindnesses, be counted an apostle, and yet prove rotten at heart in the end, all this at first sight appears incredible and impossible. Yet the case of Judas shows plainly that the heart of man is "*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.*" No mortal knows the extent of the desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man. Let us thank God if we

know anything of faith, and can say, with all our sense of weakness and infirmity, “I believe on the Son of God.” Then “*let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

This act performed upon the Lord Jesus was an act of singular respect and honor. It showed great humility on the part of this woman. More importantly, it was a literal fulfillment of the Song of Solomon (1:12) — “*While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*” What this woman did for the honor of Christ, every Gospel preacher must do every time he stands to preach the Gospel. The Word of God is like a sacred chest containing precious spikenard, the rich, fragrant spikenard of Christ crucified. As this dear woman broke open her box of spikenard, it is the privilege and responsibility of the Gospel preacher to break open the Word of God, that the sweet, sweet aroma of Christ may fill His house. The Gospel of Christ is as ointment poured forth. The sweet savor of the knowledge of Christ is diffused in the house of God when Christ is preached.

Let every ransomed sinner anoint the Son of God spiritually, by faith in Him, giving Him the honor He so richly deserves. Anoint Him as your sovereign King with the kiss of allegiance. Anoint Him as your glorious Savior with the kiss of repentance. Anoint Him as your Beloved with the kiss of affection.

Mary lost nothing. Her oil was not wasted. Her labor was not spent in vain. She got by it that good name which Solomon says is “*better than precious ointment.*” You can count on this: those who honor Christ, Christ will honor (1 Samuel 2:30). — “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

“Behold, Thy King Cometh!”

“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and *that* they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.”
(John 12:12-19)

This passage of Scripture, at first glance, appears to be out of sync with the rest of our Lord’s earthly life and ministry. It is unlike anything else recorded of him in the New Testament. It tells us of the only recorded event in the life of our Lord Jesus which he intentionally made public to the highest possible degree. It is recorded four times in the New Testament. Obviously, the scene before us is one which ought to be studied carefully and frequently. May God the Holy Spirit give us grace and wisdom to learn the things taught here, so that we may properly love, trust, serve, and honor our great King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The narrative reads like the account of some royal conqueror returning to his own city. “*Much people,*” “*a great multitude*” swelled quickly to “*multitudes*” (Some estimate the crowd to have been more than 300,000!), accompanying the Lord Jesus Christ in what is described as his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. Loud cries of praise and expressions of adulation rang through the air. “*All the city was moved.*” Everyone wanted to know, “*Who is this?*”

Everything in this passage seems to contradict the whole tenor of our Lord’s earthly life and ministry. It seems to be altogether unlike him who would not cry, nor strive, nor lift up his voice in the streets. He always withdrew from the crowd, hid from applause, and urged those who were healed by his power to tell no one what he had done for them.

Yet, our Lord’s public, triumphal entry into Jerusalem at this time is just what we should expect to see. He knew well that the hour of his death, the hour of his glory, the hour of his manifestation was near. The time of his humiliation and earthly ministry were drawing to a close. The hour was rapidly approaching when he must finish the work which he had come into this world to perform. His last great, climatic work was before him. There was nothing left for him to do except make atonement for and redeem his people by the sacrifice of himself upon the cursed tree. Having assumed our nature, and having fulfilled all other things written in the Book of God concerning him, the Lord Jesus must now finish his work; he must fulfil all righteousness by his sin-atonement death. Now, he must satisfy justice and put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself.

His Hour

The Savior’s long anticipated hour had arrived. The time had come at last when Christ was to die for his people. The time had come when the true Passover Lamb must be slain, when the true blood of atonement must be shed, when Messiah was to be “*cut off*” according to the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:26), when the way into the holiest must be opened for needy sinners by the true High Priest.

Knowing all this, our Lord Jesus purposefully drew attention to himself. Knowing this, he placed himself prominently under the notice of the whole Jewish nation. It was only right that this thing not be “*done in a corner*” (Acts 26:26). If ever there was a transaction in our Lord’s earthly ministry which was public, it was

the Sacrifice he offered upon the cross of Calvary. He died at the time of year when all the tribes were assembled at Jerusalem for the passover feast. By divine, providential arrangement, according to the purpose of God in eternal predestination, our blessed Savior died within a week of his remarkable, public, triumphal entry into Jerusalem, by which he had caused the eyes of all Israel to be fixed upon him. Within a week of this public pronouncement of the multitudes who — *“Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord,”* this same multitude cried, — *“Crucify him! Crucify him! His blood be on us, and on our children!”*

Our Lord deemed it proper that every eye should be fixed upon him as he came to be offered up as the Lamb of God. He would have his great work of redemption known and advertised by everyone in Jerusalem. The sin atoning blood of the Son of God was about to be shed. And this great deed was not to be *“done in a corner”* (Acts 26:26). Therefore, he who had deliberately spent most of his life in secrecy, secluded from public view, he who would not allow his admirers to make him a king, now comes to announce himself King in the most public manner imaginable. His death would be his entrance into his kingdom. Therefore, he made a royal procession through the streets of Jerusalem. This royal procession was our Lord’s public declaration that he is indeed the Christ of God, and that he was about to enter into his kingdom.

The King

The Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, God the Son, the second person of the blessed Trinity, is the King of Glory and the King of the Universe.¹ The Lord Jesus Christ is King over all things by virtue of his obedience to God as our Substitute (Psalm 2:8; John 17:2; Romans 14:9; Ephesians 1:21-22; Philippians 2:9-11). Let us ever worship and obey him as our great King. Let us ever throw off our filthy garments of self-righteousness before him and worship him, saying, *“Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”*

The word *“Hosanna”* is an exclamation of adoration and praise; but it is more than that. The word means *“save me.”* We worship and adore Christ as our Savior only when we bow to him as our King; and we bow to him as our king only when we worship and trust him as our Savior, laying everything at his feet, just as these multitudes *“spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way”* before the King.

Voluntary Sacrifice

The first thing that strikes me in this passage is the obvious fact that our Lord’s sacrifice of himself as our Substitute was a voluntary sacrifice. His sufferings were voluntary. His death was voluntary. That which is written here displays as clearly as the noonday sun, as the Scriptures universally declare, that the Lord our God, our great Savior, holds a sovereign, mysterious influence over the minds and wills of all men. Nothing else can account for the effect his entrance into Jerusalem had upon the multitudes who surrounded him. They were moved and carried forward by the secret constraining power of the sovereign Lord God to do his will, though they knew him not. At what other time did the common people in Israel act in defiance of the bulk of their religious leaders? But here, they are defiant, declaring Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, the Christ, though the Chief Priests and the Pharisees had made it known that he was to be put to death (John 11:57).

Just as he made winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils obey his will, so he turned the minds of men according to his will; and he still does.

¹ Our Lord Jesus Christ is, always was, and always shall be King over everybody and everything by virtue of the fact that he is God. The one true and living God is King everywhere. He always has his way and does his will. But in this text, we have a presentation of Christ as our Mediatorial King, which is a kingship and dominion given to him as the God-man by the Triune Jehovah as the reward of his obedience unto death as our Mediator

The man Christ Jesus, our Savior, exercised this power that belongs to God alone while he walked upon this earth. The men of Nazareth could not hold him when he “*passing through the midst of them, went his way*” (Luke 4:30). The angry Jews of Jerusalem could not detain him when they would have laid violent hands on him in the temple; but, “*Jesus...going through the midst of them,...passed by*” (John 8:59). Above all, the very soldiers who apprehended him in the garden, at first “*went backward and fell to the ground,*” when he revealed himself as Jehovah, the “*I AM*” (John 18:6).

In each of these things there can be but one explanation. The only possible explanation is the thing God taught Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. — “*The heavens do rule!*” And he who walked on earth in human flesh was and is God on his throne in the highest heaven! Throughout our Savior’s earthly ministry, we see these mighty acts which displayed a mysterious “*hiding of his power*” (Habakkuk 3:4).

If he is God almighty, the omnipotent Jehovah, why didn’t he resist his enemies? Why didn’t he scatter the band of soldiers who came to arrest him, like chaff before the wind? There is but one answer. — He was a willing Substitute! His sacrifice was a willing, voluntary sacrifice. His death was the death of one who wanted to die in the stead of chosen sinners, loved by him with an everlasting love. He freely laid down his life in our room and stead that he might make atonement for our sins and redeem us from all iniquity. He had undertaken to give his own life as a ransom that we might live forever, and he laid it down upon the cursed tree with all the desire of his holy heart. As J. C. Ryle put it...

“He did not bleed and suffer and die because he was vanquished by superior force, and could not help himself, but because he loved us and rejoiced to give himself for us as our Substitute. He did not die because he could not avoid death, but because he was willing with all his heart to make his soul an offering for sin.”

O my soul, forever rest upon this blessed Savior and Redeemer! Forever let us rest our hearts on this sweet revelation of grace. — Our Lord Jesus is a willing Savior, a voluntary Redeemer. It was his delight to do his Father’s will. It was his delight to make a way for poor, lost, guilty sinners to draw near to God in peace. He loved the work he undertook as our Surety in old eternity. He delights in mercy and rejoices in forgiving sin. He is willing to save, willing to receive all who come to God by him. He who was willing to suffer all the horrid, ignominious agony of the cursed death he endured in our stead, he who was willing to be made sin for us, he who was willing to be made a curse for us is willing to save all who come to God by him!

Prophecy Fulfilled

First, we see in our text that our Lord Jesus Christ was a voluntary Substitute. *Second*, our text stands before us as an undeniable assurance that this Book, the Holy Bible, is in truth the inspired, inerrant Word of God. In fact, in Matthew’s account (Matthew 21:4-5), the Holy Spirit specifically tells us that all this was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. — “*All this was done,*” not because our Lord Jesus was incapable of walking the distance to Jerusalem, but “*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,*” the King of Glory rode into Jerusalem on “*an ass’s colt*” Then the Holy Spirit puts two Old Testament passages together (Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:4-5).

“And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.” (John 12:14-15)

Yes, this Book, the Bible, is, without question, the Word of God, fully and perfectly inspired and without error (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Zechariah’s prophecy was made more than 550 years before this event; and it is here fulfilled in every detail. Once more, we see a clear example of the complete harmony of the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Faith's Object

Third, and this is very, very important; our text shows us that faith's object is Christ himself. Do not misunderstand me. It is important what you believe. I make no apology for declaring that it is impossible for anyone to be saved believing a false gospel. The Scriptures are crystal clear in this regard (Galatians 1:6-8; 5:2-4; 1 John 2:23-24; 4:2; 5:1). — If you do not believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, — If you do not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ actually accomplished all that the prophets said he would accomplish, — If you do not believe that the Lord Jesus brought in everlasting righteousness, put away sin, and saved his people from their sins, obtaining eternal redemption for all God's elect by the sacrifice of himself, you are not born of God.

There is no such thing as a saved, will-worshipping Arminian. If you believe that Christ is a failure, that he tries to save people who are ultimately lost forever in hell, because they would not let him have his way, or because they did something he could not overcome, or because they did not do something he left undone, you are yet without hope. The Christ you trust is anti-Christ. But the object of faith is not what you know about Christ. The object of saving faith is Christ himself (John 17:3).

“These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him” (v. 16). — These disciples, including the Apostles, did not at this time understand the things our Lord taught them from the Scriptures about his death and resurrection.

“They saw Christ riding into Jerusalem on the ass, the people scattering the palm branches and their clothes before him, crying, ‘Hosanna to the King of Israel;’ but to what purpose this was done and what prophecies were fulfilled they understood not; for, like the others, they thought of the Messiah as a Jewish ruler. But after Christ died and rose again, they began to remember his words concerning these things and why they were done, as Peter clearly preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-36).” (Henry Mahan)

John tells us that the disciples did not understand Zechariah's prophecy and our Lord's doctrine, until later. Sadly, there are many who know the Lord's doctrine, and know it very precisely, but do not know the Lord. Balaam stands as a clear beacon of this fact. And there are some true believers, men and women who trust Christ, whose understanding of his doctrine is not very clear. Apollos was a man mighty in the Scriptures; but he knew only the teachings of John the Baptist, until Priscilla and Aquilla took him into their hearts and instructed him in the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:24-28). Cornelius was a devout man, one who feared God. The Lord himself sent an angel to him, assuring him that his prayers and alms came up as a memorial to God. Yet, Cornelius did not even know that Christ had come. He knew only the Old Testament Scriptures until Peter came and preached the gospel to him (Acts 10); but clearly he was a believer. It is not what you believe that is saving, but who. Christ alone is the object of saving faith, not doctrine, feelings, experiences, or knowledge.

Only after our Lord's resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, once he was enthroned as the King of Zion, did things begin to fall into place. Then the disciples began to understand what he had really meant by the things he did and said.

For those early disciples, the things they remembered must have been sort of like reading a good novel. As you read a novel, in the early chapters you wonder why this character was introduced, what that comment means, why the person did this or that, and why this thing or that happened. Then, when you get to the last chapter, everything unfolds and falls into place. I suspect that is the way it was for the apostles after the resurrection. Lights went on everywhere. There must have been a hundred things about which they said, “That is what the Master meant. This is what he was telling us. So that is what he was talking about when he said

'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). — *'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit'* (John 12:24). — *'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner'* (Matthew 21:42). — *'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father'* (John 16:16). — *'If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?'* (Matthew 22:45)

All of our Savior's words and deeds shined with new and clear meaning in the light of his resurrection and exaltation. Not only that, once the Lord Jesus was enthroned as King and poured out upon them his Spirit, the Old Testament popped open. When our Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an ass's colt, John tells us the whole thing went over their heads. They did not have a clue what was happening at the time. But later Zechariah's prophecy flamed with light, as they realized that they had witnessed its actual fulfillment on that day when they saw the Savior riding into Jerusalem.

How thankful we ought to be for the blessed gift of God the Holy Spirit, who alone can open to our dull hearts and minds the things of Christ (John 7:39; 14:26).

"Thy King Cometh!"

Fourth, let's go back to Zechariah's prophecy (Zechariah 9:9), and see the blessedness of this Gospel declaration. — *"Behold, thy King cometh!"* Zechariah 9:9 begins with a command to rejoice. — *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!"* Zion is simply another name for Jerusalem. Zechariah repeats himself for emphasis. The phrases *"daughter of Zion"* and *"daughter of Jerusalem"* refer to the citizens of Zion and Jerusalem. This command to rejoice is given to the church of God. It is God's command to us. He is telling us to draw our waters out of the Well of Salvation with joy. And he tells us why we should do so.

"Behold, thy King cometh." — Zechariah is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah the Prince, as Daniel called him (Daniel 9:25). This is the sum of all the good news in the world. — *"Behold, thy King cometh!"* Let this blessed fact swallow up every sorrow, and cause songs of joy to burst from our hearts (Jeremiah 31:12). — *"Hosanna in the highest; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"* Let every believer be sure to read the prophecy as the promise of God to you personally. — *"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee."* — There is no king like our King. Christ Jesus, your Lord and your King comes to you, for your everlasting benefit.

The church, the city of God, is here called to gladness and shoutings of joy. Babylon may mourn; but Zion must rejoice. Egypt may howl; but Jerusalem must shout. O child of God, *"rejoice and be exceeding glad."* Be not of a heavy heart. *"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;"* and all who are born of God are citizens of the joyous city, the city of the great King.

Jerusalem has a King. He is *"the great King,"* — *"King of kings and Lord of lords,"* — *"King of Israel,"* — *"King of nations,"* — *"the Prince of the kings of the earth."* His name is Jesus of Nazareth. — He is *"the Word made flesh,"* the God-man, *"Emmanuel, God with us,"* *"thy King."* It is written, in Psalm 149:2, *"Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King!"*

Nothing is said here of Zion being joyful in what their King had done for them. Those things in their proper place are truly sweet subjects of praise. But the subject of Zion's praise is, first and foremost, the King, Christ Jesus himself. Let us never forget this apparently small, but most important distinction. The Lord is gracious in his gifts, gracious in his love, gracious in his salvation. Everything he gives is from his mercy and to be acknowledged with praise and thanksgiving. But it is Christ himself, not his gifts, that is the Object of our

faith, hope, love and joy. It is Christ himself I want and must have. In him I have all things and abound. Without him I am lost forever!

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:4-8)

Present Tense

Read the prophecy as it is written in the present tense. — “*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!*” For four thousand years he was “the coming one.” For four thousand years the promise spoke of his coming. Now he has come. But, I like to read the Word of God with personal application. “*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!*” (Song of Solomon 2:8; 3:6). In his Word, by his Spirit, in his house, in his ordinances, in saving grace, in reviving mercy, in restoring goodness, in great faithfulness, tender-mercy, and lovingkindness, “*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!*” O child of God, “*thy King cometh unto thee;*” and he bids you come to him (Matthew 11:28-30).

“*He is just, and having salvation.*” — He is just that he might justify us by his righteousness and save us by his merit and his grace. He is the just God and our Savior, just and the Justifier of all who trust him. He is our Savior, because he is our Justifier, because he is the Just One. He has a righteous salvation for unrighteous men. It is salvation to the uttermost, because he is mighty to save and just to save. Jesus Christ the righteous came into the world to save sinners.

He comes to us “*having salvation!*” Oh, how I love those words — “*having salvation.*” Don’t you? He comes to our poor souls with salvation in his hand to execute. He had the salvation of our souls in his heart from eternity. It was trusted to his hands as our Surety before the worlds were made. The covenant of grace, in which salvation is the principal article, was made with him; and he, as the Surety of that covenant, undertook the work. In the fulness of time, being sent of the Father, he came into the world to save his people from their sins. Entering once into heaven with his own blood, he obtained eternal redemption for us. And now, “*thy King cometh unto thee — having salvation!*”

Zechariah continues to describe our King, telling us how he came to redeem us and how he comes to save us. — “*Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*” — Our great King was meek and lowly; even when he came to Jerusalem in triumph. He showed his meekness by the way he came. No troops of soldiers, no guards, no procession, no banners waving! No chariot, no war horse! He rides upon an ass, and alongside there is the colt, the foal of an ass, just as they were found, unprepared and unadorned. He is at once the most lofty and the most lowly of the sons of men. None ever came from such a height, or went down to such a depth as he (2 Corinthians 8:9).

O sinner, come and learn of this lowly one. He will give you rest. Give him your fullest confidence, in spite of all the evil, and the darkness, and the folly that is in you. Keep ever near his side. Look at him, love him, speak to him, trust him. Does he frown? Does he turn away? No, he bids us welcome; and the more we need him, the more welcome we are.

An Allegory

Fifth, I want us to view this entire picture allegorically. There is more to be learned from this prophecy than just its historic fulfillment by our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There are spiritual things revealed here that tell us how it is that God our Savior saves his elect. As the Holy Spirit tells us in Galatians 4 that the story of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory, this too is an allegory. It is a prophecy of a true, historical event; but it is more. It portrays God's free, sovereign, saving grace in and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must never spiritualize Holy Scripture. I mean by that statement that we must never twist the Scriptures into whatever it is we want them to teach. To do so is to treat the Word of God with horrible irreverence. Yet, when we read the Word of God, we are always to look for the spiritual meaning, the gospel message each particular passage is intended to convey. This is, in my opinion, especially true when we read the Gospel narratives of our Lord's life and ministry, knowing that every event in the earthly life of our Savior and every miracle performed by him is written in the Book of God to give us a picture, an object lesson about his great salvation.

When we read the Book of God in this way, it comes to life. When my grandson, Will, was just a couple of years old, he walked over to the office one Sunday morning and crawled up on my lap, while I was preparing to preach. Pointing to my opened Bible, he asked, "Poppy, Is this where Jesus lives?" I gave him a longer answer, but the fact is, the answer to his question is, "Yes, the Lord Jesus lives right here in this blessed Book."

Every word he spoke, every movement he made, every step he took was predetermined before the world began for the salvation of his elect and was designed by God's eternal decree to show us something of God's sovereign, electing, redeeming, saving, mercy, love and grace through Christ our Redeemer. Even the small details, those things that appear to be no more than records with information, show forth his great salvation.

Blessed be his holy name, the Lord Jesus still comes "*riding upon an ass*" when he comes to save his own. When we think of our Lord Jesus riding the wild ass's colt through the streets of Jerusalem, we ought to see it as a picture of his sovereign, electing, fetching, irresistible, saving grace.

The Apostle John, quoting the prophet Zechariah, shows us here that when Christ rode into Jerusalem, his triumphal entry was made in the way it was made to display the character of his kingdom and his work as our King. He came riding "*an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass*" to show himself in the infinite humility of his grace as one who is "*just and having salvation.*" He comes to break the bow of war and "*speak peace unto the heathen,*" and to do so in universal dominion "*from sea to sea, even to the ends of the earth.*"

Job 11:12

In Job 11:12 we see who the wild ass's colt is, upon whom the King of Glory rides through the streets of Jerusalem in triumphant grace. The wild ass's colt, an ass upon which no man ever before sat, the ass upon which our Savior rode through Jerusalem is in Scripture a picture of fallen man. You and I are all born by nature "*like a wild ass's colt,*" foolish, senseless, stubborn, and wild, given to lust and debauchery. As the wild ass will not bear the yoke, so none will ever bow to the yoke of Christ, except the Son of God break him. Man by nature is like "*a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up wind at her pleasure*" (Jeremiah 2:24; Job 39:5).

In the movies we see old men and women riding donkeys, and get the idea that they are nice, gentle, sweet animals, the kind you would like to have for pets, if you just had the room. But that is never the case by nature. It is their nature to be mean. If you try to get one to ride you, to carry a load, to pull a cart until he is broken and tamed, he will buck and kick and bite. If all else fails, he will just sit down.

That's a pretty good picture of fallen man. Made by God and made for his glory, all men ought to gladly give thanks to him, submit to his rule, worship him, and give him his due. But when you try to get one to worship God, watch him kick. Tell sweet, religious wild asses the truth about man, about God, about Christ,

about redemption and grace, and they will buck and bite. But when the King of Grace mounts the wild ass, he is broken and gladly ridden.

I once read that one of the rarest mammals in world is the African Wild Ass. There are not more than a few hundred in the world. I am not really very interested in that. But I am interested in the people represented in our text by the wild ass's colt. And I can tell you that they are very, very rare.

“To understand these things aright,
This grand distinction should be known:
Though all are sinners in God's sight,
There are but few so in their own.
To such as these our Lord was sent;
They're only sinners who repent.

What comfort can a Savior bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing;
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.
New life from Him we must receive,
Before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own,
Well worthy 'tis to be believed,
That Christ into the world came down,
That sinners might by Him be saved.
Sinners are high in His esteem,
And sinners highly value Him.”

“Glorify Thy Name”

“And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour. 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. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” (John 12:20-33)

“*And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast*” (v. 20). — The Passover Feast was one of the great, important holy days God commanded the Jews to keep every year. It was a week long festival, which culminated in the slaying of the paschal lamb. Jews from everywhere were gathered at Jerusalem for this holy festival. Among the Jews there was also a large multitude of Gentile proselytes, Gentiles who had been converted to the Jews’ religion. The men mentioned in this verse were Greeks who had turned from their heathen idols and were seeking the knowledge of the one true and living God.

They were allowed to come to the temple, but only to the Gentile court. In the Old Testament Gentiles were never allowed the privileges of full acceptance with the Jews. Thank God, in Christ’s spiritual kingdom, the Church, the Israel of God, there are no racial, social, economic, or ceremonial separations. We are all one in him! — “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28). — “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature*” (Galatians 6:15). — In the New Creation of Grace, “*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all*” (Colossians 3:11).

Gentiles Seeking Jesus

These Greeks came to Jerusalem to worship God. While they were there they heard about a man, a mighty miracle-worker, a prophet, whom a few fishermen worshipped as the Christ, the Messiah. “*The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus*” (v. 21). — These Greeks came to Philip and requested an audience with the Lord Jesus. They had heard about the Savior’s many miracles. Most notably, they had heard about the resurrection of Lazarus (John 12:9), who was a great type of every regenerate soul being raised from death to life by Christ (John 5:25; Ephesians 2:1-5). Being Gentiles, these men were reluctant to approach the Master personally. So they took their request to Philip, who was from Bethsaida, and was perhaps a neighbor. It seems likely that they knew Philip and knew that he was one of the Lord’s disciples. — Look at verse 22...

“*Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*” — Philip talked this matter over with Andrew. Then he and Andrew together brought the matter before the Lord Jesus. Why do you suppose such a simple request presented such a problem? Let me suggest three reasons why this thing seemed to greatly disturb Philip and Andrew.

First, things were in great turmoil at Jerusalem. The Chief Priests talked about killing Lazarus. (v. 10). The people talked about making Jesus of Nazareth king (vv. 12-13). The Pharisees were worried and angry about losing their position, power, and influence (v. 19).

Second, the Lord's disciples simply did not yet understand the necessity of his death and resurrection as their Substitute and the true, spiritual nature of God's kingdom. They trusted the Lord Jesus. They knew him; but they knew little of his doctrine. They knew very little of what he had taught them day and night for more than three years. They knew that he was their Savior; but they do not appear to have known that his death upon the cursed tree was necessary for their redemption and salvation. — "*These things understood not his disciples*" (v. 16). They wanted Christ to live, not to die. They wanted an earthly, Jewish kingdom (Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6). But the Son of God must be crucified, or God's elect could not be saved (Romans 3:24-26).

Third, Philip may have thought that if the Master received these Gentiles, that would be the last straw. That, he may have thought, would give the Pharisees the excuse they were looking for to kill him. I can almost hear his counsel, — "Lord, these Greeks are asking for an audience with you. Andrew and I have discussed it. And, well, we just do not think it would be wise to receive them right now. The priests are talking about killing Lazarus. The Pharisees are worried sick, afraid of losing their hold over the people. But the people are for you. They want to make you king! To receive these Greeks now would spoil everything." Then, in verses 23-33 the Master himself speaks. He seized the opportunity to instruct and challenge his disciples.

The Purpose of His Incarnation

"*And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified*" (v. 23). — Here our Savior shows us again the purpose of his incarnation. He said, "*The hour is come!*" The crisis he had been telling them about had arrived (John 2:4; 7:30). This was not the hour when the King of Israel must be glorified as the Son of God, over all, blessed forever. This was not the hour when the Judge of all men must be made manifest. This was not the hour when the Son of Man must be glorified as the God of glory. This was not the hour when men must own our dear Savior as the King of kings and Lord of lords. All these things will come in due time; but this was not the time. This was the hour of the Son of Man, the last Adam (1 Timothy 2:5; John 17:1-5). This was the hour of redemption (Daniel 9:24). This was the hour for which the Son of God came into this world (Hebrews 10:5-10).

The Meaning of His Death

"*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (v. 24). — Here our Savior shows us the meaning of his death. He portrays himself as a grain of corn, or wheat. It has much potential. There is in this one grain much corn, but only if it dies. If it dies, it will bring forth much fruit, but only if it dies. If it does not die, it must abide alone. So our Lord has many people in him (Ephesians 1:3-6). He must die, or he must abide alone. But if he dies all who are in him will come to life; and all shall be like him. The corn sown and the corn reaped are identical. That is the blessed hope that fills our souls with joy (Jude 24-25). Thus the Son of Man will be glorified (v. 23; Isaiah 53:10-12).

The Way of Salvation

"*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*" — What a blessed illustration of his redemptive, life giving death! But he does not stop there. He had a death to die. And all who would be his disciples also have a death to die. The same principle is involved. In verses 25-26 the Lord Jesus shows us the way of life and salvation in him. Do you ask, "How can I be saved?" Here's the answer. If you would save your life, you must lose it.

“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour.”

Let me show you what these things mean. A farmer has a bushel of wheat, good wheat. It is his. He can keep it for a little while. He can eat it. Or he can feed it to his hogs. But if he keeps it, uses it to satisfy his carnal appetite, uses it only for passing, momentary purposes, or wastes it, he will lose it, and lose it very soon. However, if, with an eye to the future, he takes that corn and casts it away from himself into the ground, keeping only what is necessary for the present, he will soon have an abundant harvest of corn.

So, too, I have a life. You, too. What shall I do with it? Keep it? Love it? Protect it? Shield it from danger and difficulty? Pamper it? Cater to it? I can. It is my life. You can, too. But if I keep my life, I will lose it; and the same is true of you. However, if I give my life to Christ, if you give your life to Christ, we will have an indescribable abundance of life, even eternal life, here and in the world to come.

The fact is, no man can have two masters. No man can both love Christ and the world. No man can walk in two directions. If you love this world and this life, you will lose it. If you lose your life to Christ, love, trust, and follow him, you gain eternal life. You cannot do both (Acts 20:28; 2 Timothy 1:12).

“*If any man serve me, let him follow me.*” — To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to serve him and follow him. Faith in Christ is giving ourselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ, as bond slaves of old to follow and serve him, consecrated to him! — What a challenge! I am talking about putting your hand to the plow and never going back, never looking back! I am talking about Jephthah’s commitment (Judges 11). I am talking about Ruth’s resolve (Ruth 1:16-17).

“*Where I am, there shall also my servant be.*” — Here our Lord Jesus explains what it is to follow him. It is not mine to determine where he is, or what he does, but by his Word and Spirit to find out where he is and what he does, and follow him. There is no guess work involved. He is about his Father’s business. He is seeking his sheep (Luke 19:10). He is ministering to the needs of men. He is among his people. He is washing his disciples’ feet. He is in prayer (John 7:53-8:1). “*Every man went to his own house.*” But the Savior went out to the Mount to pray. He is despised and hated by this world. They took him outside the city and nailed him to the tree. — “*Let us go unto him, without the camp!*” He is nailed to a cross. — “*God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Let me with my Savior be crucified to the world and the world to me. He is risen and seated in the heavens.

“Take the world, but give me Jesus.
All its joys are but a name!
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same!

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
Sweetest comfort of my soul;
Then throughout my pilgrim journey,
I can sing while billows roll.

O the height and depth of mercy!
O the length and breadth of love!
O the fullness of redemption,
Pledge of endless life above!”

Then, our Master says, “*If any man serve me, him will my Father honor;*” and he will, both here and hereafter (1 Samuel 2:30).

The Object of His Life

Then, in verses 27-28 our Savior shows us by example what he meant. Here, he shows us the object of his life. He lived for and served the will and glory of God.

“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. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again.”

O Spirit of God, give me the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, graciously, effectually teaching me to live in this world only to serve the will of God and the glory of God!

The Accomplishments of His Death

The Lord Jesus tells us of the accomplishment of his death in verses 29-33.

“The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” (John 12:29-33)

Our Savior’s death upon the cursed tree was the judgment of this world and his long-anticipated triumph over Satan, crushing the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15; v. 31). Thus, by the accomplishment of redemption for us, the Son of God effectually draws chosen, redeemed sinners to himself in this, the day of his power (v. 32; Psalm 110:3).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Pearl of Great Price. Will you buy this Pearl, or will you pass it by? A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son. About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, “Sir, you don’t know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art.” The young man held out this package. “I know this isn’t much. I’m not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this.” The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. “Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It’s a gift.”

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected. The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. “We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?” There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, “We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one.” But the auctioneer persisted. “Will somebody bid for this painting. Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?” Another voice said angrily. “We didn’t come to see this painting. We

came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandt's. Get on with the real bids!" But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?" Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford. "We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" "Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters." "\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!" A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!" The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction is over." "What about the paintings?" "I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

So it is with the Christ of God. — He who gets the Son gets everything.

The Crisis of the World

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.”
(John 12:31-33)

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). — This is never more clearly and extraordinarily demonstrated to be the truth than by these statements which fell from the lips of our Savior. It is a great marvel to me that God should, in his infinite wisdom, choose to judge the world, destroy the devil, and save his elect by sending his Son to become a man that he might suffer and die upon the cursed tree! Oh, mystery of mysteries, — *“God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* Oh, the height of God’s love! Oh, the depth of his mercy! Oh, the breadth of his wisdom! Indeed, his ways and his thoughts are beyond us, as high as the heavens are above the earth.

In this 12th chapter of John our Lord Jesus rehearsed his sin-atoning death with his disciples before it actually took place. He saw those Greeks who came to Philip, and whom Philip and Andrew brought to him; and his heart was filled with joy. This, he knew was to be the result of his death, that the Gentiles would be gathered to him. That thought reminded him of his approaching crucifixion. It was now very near. Only a few days were to pass; and then he would die upon the cursed tree.

Our Troubled Savior

In anticipation of Calvary, his soul was full of trouble. It was not that he feared death; but his death was to be a very peculiar one. Death is the penalty of sin; but he had done no sin. Death was due to the sons of Adam; but he is the Son of God. He was to die the Just for the unjust. He was to bear our sins in his own body upon the cursed tree. Is it any wonder that his pure and holy soul should shrink from contact with sin, let alone from being made sin? To stand in the sinner’s place, to hang before his holy Father as a horrid mass of iniquity, to endure the Father’s wrath as a guilty man deserving his wrath were thoughts astonishing to him. He was, as a man, very faint of heart, and cried, — *“What shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.”* Here we see the Savior of the world, the eternal Son of God troubled and disturbed in mind. We see him, who could heal diseases with his touch, cast out demons with a word, command the waves to obey him, and call the dead to life, in great agony and conflict. Nothing can ever explain our Lord’s agony here, and later in Gethsemane, except that he felt the great burden of all the sins of his people pressing him down. Without any repining at his Father’s will, he saw how terrible that will was; and he shuddered at what it included. Here the God-man was sipping that bitter cup which he was to drink until he could cry, *“It is finished,”* and give up the ghost.

When our blessed Savior was in this great distress of mind in anticipation of the terrible sufferings he was about to endure, his Father spoke to him out of heaven saying, — *“I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”* How beautifully this shows that the intimate relation and union of God the Father and God the Son was unbroken during the whole course of the Savior’s pilgrimage. This was also a testimony to those who stood by that God the Father completely approved of his eternal Son as the Messiah, the Redeemer, and the Savior of men.

Child of God, here is a word of encouragement for you when you are in distress. In your hour of trial God will speak to you, as he did to his Son. If you are his child, when the weakness of your flesh seems to prevail over your spirit, you, too, shall have the reassuring voice from heaven.

The Savior seems to have recovered himself at once; and bracing himself up, he once again indulged his heart with the vision of the glorious results of his death. Here he assured his disciples, and assures us that by his death upon the cross he would seal every purpose of God for the world, the devil, and his elect.

Success in Death

You will recall that on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah spoke to our Redeemer about “*the death he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*” Here, in verses 31-32, our Savior tells us about that which he would accomplish (that which he did accomplish) in his death as our sin-atonement Substitute. First, the Lord Jesus declared the sure and certain success of his death (vv. 31-32).

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me.”

As the Son of God anticipated his sufferings and death, he spoke as though they were already accomplished, and sums up the consequences in these three points:

1. “*Now is the judgment of this world.*”
2. “*Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*”
3. “*If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.*”

Judgment of the World

First, the death of Christ was the judgment of this world. What does that mean? The word translated “*judgment*” is the Greek word from which our English word “*crisis*” is derived. — So our Lord’s words might be accurately translated, — “*Now is the crisis of this world.*”

Indeed, the death of Christ was the crisis of the world. The cross of Jesus Christ was the turning point, the hinge of the world’s history. The death of Christ was the death of sin, the crushing of the serpent’s head, and victory over death. And by his death upon the cursed tree, our blessed Savior secured the regeneration of the earth (Revelation 21:5).

The death of Christ was also the judgment of the world. The world was convicted of guilt (Acts 2:23; John 1:4-5, 10-11). The world hated perfect love and perfect righteousness, and murdered the Son of God! The world would pull God off his throne and slay him, if they had it in their power. The world is not good, but guilty. — How dare we embrace the world!

The world was sentenced to death when it put to death the Lord of Glory. The death of Christ is the clearest possible display of the heinousness of sin; and the death of Christ is the clearest possible display of divine justice. If the Lord Jesus, God’s darling Son, escaped not the Father’s wrath in bringing many sons to glory, when sin was found upon him, if sin is found on you, surely you must die! God must be just. That means that if you die without Christ, there is no hope. If you have no propitiation by the blood of Jesus, God must slay you.

By the cross you are judged; and by the cross you shall be judged! By the cross God judged the world. By the cross, let us judge the world: its’ religion, its’ favor, its’ frowns, its’ fame, and its’ friendship (1 John 2:15-17; Galatians 6:14).

It is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ “*by which the world is crucified unto me*” (Galatians 6:14). Faith in Christ, the assurance of redemption by Christ, caused the Apostle Paul to look upon the world as a thing crucified. He knew that he had no more reason to fear his most implacable enemies in this world than a man would have reason to fear someone crucified and dead. Happy are those who learn this. Because our Lord Jesus

Christ, by his death upon the cross as our Substitute and Redeemer, has overcome the world, conquered Satan (the prince of this world) and cast him out, and vanquished death, hell, and the grave, since he has put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, we are more than conquerors in him (Romans 8:32-39). We have nothing to fear in this world or from this world. As the children of Israel looked upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian army slain by God in the Red Sea, and sang praise to him, so we ought to look upon all that opposes us in this world as dead, and sing praise to God our Savior who has *“triumphed gloriously.”* Let us neither love the world, nor the things that are in the world, but look upon them as dead things. The gospel of the grace of God experienced in the soul teaches us to despise the riches, honors, and applause of the world. The profits, pleasures, and praises of dead men are as worthless as dung. That is exactly how they are to be looked upon and counted by all who seek Christ (Philippians 3:7-15).

But, as Paul uses the term *“world”* here in the book of Galatians, he is specifically referring to *“the weak and beggarly elements of the world”* (Galatians 4:3-9), the carnal ordinances and ceremonies of the law. He is declaring that since *“Christ is the end of the law”* (Romans 10:4), the law’s sabbath days, sacrifices, and services are to be looked upon by us as dead things (Romans 6:15; 7:4; Galatians 2:19-20). Our all-glorious Redeemer took *“the handwriting of the ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Colossians 2:14).

“The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” — As the world had no more attraction for Paul than a dead corpse, so he had no attraction for the world, but was despised by it for Christ’s sake. So it shall ever be with those who follow Christ. As the law was dead to him and had no power over him, so he was dead to the law by the sacrifice of Christ. He had nothing to do with those weak and beggarly elements of bondage.

Satan Cast Out

The *second* result of Christ’s death is this: — The prince of this world is cast out. It is certain that by crucifying the Lord of Glory, men by their wicked hands cast out Christ, the only true Prince of this world. They cast out the Creator! But, here our Savior is describing his accomplishments, not the imagined accomplishments of his foes. He is telling us that he, the woman’s Seed, has crushed the serpent’s head.

Christ has answered Satan’s accusations against the believer (Revelation 12:7-10). The Lord Jesus Christ, by his cross, spoils Satan of his universal monarchy. He casts Satan out of the hearts of believers. Yes, Satan still roars as a lion; but his power is crippled. We are no longer under his dominion. Christ Jesus will bruise Satan under your heels shortly (Romans 16:20). Our Savior will, one day soon, thoroughly destroy our enemy. Thank God for the bruising of the Savior’s heel, for it was the crushing of the serpent’s head!

The Great Attraction

The *third* result of the Savior’s death is this: — The cross has become the center of attraction. — *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me!”* That by which sinners are attracted to the Savior is the preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:17-2:2). Not only is the preaching of the cross the centerpiece of all true Christianity, the revelation of the gospel, and the center of attraction in God’s Church, by the death of Christ upon the cursed tree, the scope of God’s mercy was manifestly widened to include Gentiles. This is the grand display of God’s amazing, infinite love (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16, 4:9). Through the cross, by the death of Christ as our sin-atoning Substitute, we have all blessings of grace: Forgiveness and Justification, Sanctification and Reconciliation, Acceptance and Preservation, Eternal Life and Heavenly Glory.

“In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear;
Till a new object struck my sight,
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood;
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

Sure never to my latest breath,
Can I forget that look
It seemed to charge me with his death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt and owned by guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins, His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

Alas! I knew not what I did,
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord have slain.

A second look He gave, which said,
'I freely all forgive,
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I died that thou mayst live.'

Thus while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue;
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.

With pleasing grief and mournful joy,
My spirit now is filled;
That I should such a life destroy
Yet live by his I killed!"

God's Magnet

Second, consider briefly the significance of our Savior's declaration — "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die*" (vv. 32-33). Our Lord Jesus Christ went to his death with a clear view of what it was. He fully knew what it meant. He went to his cross knowing that his cross was the means of his exaltation (Philippians 2:8-11; John 17:2). And our blessed Savior knew that his cross would supply our every need.

From the cross, the Lord Jesus draws sinners like a magnet draws steel. He draws sinners who cannot come to him. He draws sinners who will not come to him. He draws sinners; and he draws them to himself. The preaching of the cross attracts sinners to the Savior. We need no other attraction. The preaching of the cross is God's means of saving sinners (Romans 1:15-16; 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

The Lord Jesus knew that he would live again to exercise his dominion as Lord (Psalm 16:9-10; Isaiah 53:10-12). He knew that one day he would be surrounded by a mighty company, who would overcome by his cross. Lift your eyes yonder to Glory, and behold the power of the preached cross (Revelation 7:9-17).

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14). — By the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the world is judged, Satan is vanquished, sinners are drawn to the Savior, and Christ our Lord is exalted. Let us live by the cross for...

“The way of the cross leads home!
There’s no other way but this.
I shall ne’er get sight of the gates of light,
If the way of the cross I miss.”

The Attraction of the Cross

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.”
(John 12:32-33)

That is Christ’s own testimony to the power of his death upon the cross. There is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ that saving, effectual power that draws sinners to him in faith. Christianity is a religion about a cross. The cross of Christ is the key of knowledge which gives us understanding in Holy Scripture. As Martin Luther said, “There is not a word in the Bible which can be understood without reference to the cross.” Everything we believe has the cross for its foundation, its superstructure, and its’ covering. The cross of Christ is the essence of all biblical doctrine and the motivation for all biblical precepts. We look to the cross for the forgiveness of all sin, for justification and acceptance with God. We look to the cross for sanctification, to be made holy before God. We look to the cross for motivation, as our rule of life in this world. And we look to the cross for our entrance into heaven’s eternal glory, as the door of hope regarding the life to come.

I must needs go home by the way of the cross,
There’s no other way but his:
I shall ne’er get sight of the gates of light,
If the way of the cross I miss!

For the believer, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is everything. We say with Paul, — “*God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The Cross

It is not necessary for me to remind you of what I mean when I talk about the cross. I am not talking about the Roman gibbet upon which our Lord was crucified, or about the idolatrous crucifix which has become a piece of jewelry to so many, or about some imaginary magical sign of the cross which the papists use. I am talking about the glorious doctrine of the cross as it is set forth in the Word of God. I am talking about the atonement of sin by the death of Christ upon the cursed tree. I am talking about the putting away of sin by the suffering, bleeding, and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner’s Substitute.

This is the cross our Lord was talking about when he said, “*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*” The doctrine of Christ crucified has a marvelous, saving power. The power of the cross is not destructive power, but saving power. It is not punitive power, but forgiving power. It is not repulsive power, but drawing power. The cross of Christ is not harsh or compulsive, but attractive. Horatius Bonar wrote, “The sun draws up the vapors from the sea, and then hangs a brilliant rainbow upon them; so Christ draws up the sons of men from the depths of our low world, and glorifies them.”

The attraction of the cross is like that of the sun. It is also like the attraction of a magnet. Like the far distant North Pole, by some unseen influence, lays hold of the motionless nettle in a compass and turns it to itself, so the cross of Christ lays hold upon the hearts of the sons of men and turns them to himself, by the unseen power of his omnipotent mercy and irresistible grace. Have you felt the magnetic power of the cross? Does it now turn your heart to Christ?

It is not simply Christ himself who is the magnet; it is Christ crucified. It is our Lord’s crucifixion and death upon the cross that has imparted to him this power to draw sinners to himself. It is not Christ without the cross, nor is it the cross without Christ, but both together which draws us to him.

The Power of the Cross

Now notice the greatness of the power of the cross. It draws all men to him. Obviously, that does not mean that every person in the world will be drawn to Christ as the result of his death upon the cross. There are millions in hell who were not drawn to Christ. And there are millions upon the earth who shall never be drawn. How can they be drawn who have never heard? Yet, there is marvelous, saving power and efficacy in the cross which extends to the entire world, so that by virtue of his death upon the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ draws some from all mankind to himself. He draws Jews and Gentiles, men and women, black and white, bond and free, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. Behold the wondrous power of the cross. In the last day there shall be some of all men, some out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue gathered around the throne of the Lam, all drawn to our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the cross.

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the center from which divine omnipotence goes forth in the saving operations of grace. It is the place from which the saving power of God goes out to arrest sinners and bring them to Christ. What gives the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ such magnetic, drawing power? What is the attraction of the cross? Obviously, that is a bigger question than I can answer; but I want to show you seven things about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the crucified Christ draws sinners to himself through the preaching of the gospel.

The One Who Died

This is the first attraction of the cross. — The One who died upon the cross was no ordinary man. Many men died by Roman crucifixion before our Lord Jesus was crucified. Two men died when he died. And many were crucified after him. But this man was and is the Son of God (Matthew 27:54).

Someone said, “The wonder of the cross is not the blood, but whose blood, and to what purpose.” If that man who died upon the cross is himself God over all and blessed forever, as he most assuredly is, two things are certain.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ died as a willing Substitute, by his own voluntary consent (Luke 9:51; John 10:17, 18).
2. Whatever he intended to accomplish in his death upon the cross, he has fully accomplished (Isaiah 42:4; 53:10-11).

He shall see his seed. He shall see all his chosen seed, all his redeemed justified, sanctified, and glorified. He shall see them with himself in heaven’s everlasting bliss. He shall prolong his days. That is to say, he shall live again in resurrection glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He will rule the universe to accomplish the triune Jehovah’s eternal purpose of grace. He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge he shall justify all of those whose iniquities he bore.

The Love of God

This is the second attraction of the cross: — The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the revelation the love of God (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10).

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,

Though stretched from sky to sky!

The cross of Christ proclaims what the law could never reveal: – “*God is love.*” In the cross of Christ we see “*what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height*” of the love of God. The breadth of God’s love encompasses a world of perishing sinners. The length of God’s love spans eternity. The depth of God’s love reaches down to dregs of fallen humanity. The height of God’s love lifts us up to eternal glory. The cross of Christ shows how far men will go in sin. We crucified the Son of God. But it also shows how far God will go for man’s salvation. He gave his only begotten Son! We could never have known the love of God as we now do, had we not fallen in Adam that we might be redeemed by Christ.

Righteousness Vindicated

The third attraction of the cross is this: — The cross of Christ is a vindication of God’s righteous character and his strict justice (Isaiah 45:20-22; Romans 3:24-26). Here, in the cross of our Lord Jesus, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, and while the indescribable fury of God’s wrath is completely satisfied by the death of his Son, his infinite saving mercy is poured out upon all for whom his Son was slain.

God’s Being

The fourth attraction of the cross is the fact that — The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God’s being (John 1:18; Psalm 85:9-13). — “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*” (Proverbs 16:6). Creation tells us that God is great. Conscience tells us that God is righteous. The law tells us that God is just and holy. But only the cross of Christ reveals the entirety of God’s character. In the cross we see that God is holy and merciful, just and gracious, righteous and good, immutable and wise, omnipotent and kind, omnipresent and compassionate, omniscient and forgiving.

Covenant Ratified

Here is a fifth attraction: — The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the center of God’s purposes and the ratification of God’s covenant. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was not an afterthought with God. It was not something God did as the result of man’s disobedience to and rejection of his Son’s claims as the Messiah. Far from it! The cross of Christ is the reason for which God made the world and the object which he had in mind when he created man upon it.

The cross of Christ is the center and focal point of God’s eternal purposes and decrees (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:18-25). The cross of Christ was the central object of all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. — “*To him give all the prophets witness*” (Acts 10:43). And the cross of Christ ratified, confirmed, and fulfilled the everlasting covenant of God’s grace (Hebrews 9:14-17; 8:10-12).

Redemption Accomplished

Here is the sixth attraction of the cross: – The cross of Christ is a proclamation of redemption fully accomplished (John 19:30; Hebrews 9:12; Isaiah 40:1-2). The cross of Christ declares to sinners everywhere: Atonement is made, justice is satisfied, sin is put away. — Believe and live!

Complete atonement Christ has made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
All that His people owed:
Nor can God’s wrath on me take place,
I’m sheltered in Christ’s righteousness
And sprinkled with His blood.

Since Christ has my discharge procured
And fully in my room endured
The whole of wrath Divine –
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Transforming Power

There is yet a seventh attraction in the cross. — The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has a marvelous healing and transforming power. There is healing in the cross. He who looks to Christ is healed, healed in every part of his being, and completely healed. The healing begins now in the soul; it is completed here after in the resurrection body. Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One, is our Healer. His name is Jehovah-rapha, — “*The Lord that healeth thee*” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). “The saving power of the cross,” J. I. Packer wrote, “does not depend on faith being added to it. Its saving power is such that faith flows from it.”

In the cross of Christ I find life eternal, propitiation with God, reconciliation to God, rest from all my labor, inspiration for my life on earth, and hope for the world to come. The cross of Christ, the gospel, is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. The cross irresistibly draws our hearts to Christ. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the theme of our preaching and praise here. And the cross shall be the theme of our song in glory! — “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*” (Galatians 6:14).

“Father, Glorify Thy Name”

“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. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.” (John 12:27-30)

This chapter opens with John’s description of a good work done for the Lord Jesus Christ (John 12:1-7). In fact, this is the only work our Savior ever commended as a good work (Matthew 26:10; Mark 14:6). It was a work motivated by love, inspired by faith, a work requiring great sacrifice, and a work done just for the Lord Jesus.

The next day our Savior made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, “*sitting on an ass’s colt.*” Mary had anointed him for his burial in anticipation of his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation as King of kings and Lord of lords. Now, the very next day, the Lord God compelled the very people who would soon cry, “*Crucify him,*” to spread palm branches before him and cry, “*Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord*” (v. 13). Then...

“And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” (John 12:20-26)

Soul Trouble

Now, hear the Son of God, as he speaks of his heavy, heavy soul trouble, as he anticipates being made sin for us, bearing the furious wrath of an angry God in our place and dying in our stead upon the cursed tree.

“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. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, [saying], I have both glorified [it], and will glorify [it] again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard [it], said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.” (John 12:27-30)

“*Father, glorify thy name.*” — I cannot think of a prayer more suitable for the children of God in all seasons than that which our Savior here prayed. May God the Holy Ghost make it the cry of my heart and of yours for Christ’s sake. — “*Father, glorify thy name.*”

Context

Before I try to explain the meaning of this prayer, which was first spoken and offered to the Father by our Savior, we should look at the things which preceded and led up to it. Our Lord Jesus had performed a very remarkable miracle in raising Lazarus from the dead. The fame of that miracle spread like wildfire. Multitudes flocked to see this man, this prophet who, claiming to be the Son of God, both healed the sick and raised the

dead to life by the mere word of his power. Enthusiastic crowds gathered in such huge numbers that the Pharisees exclaimed to one another, *“The world hath gone after him.”*

Following this and the other miracles performed by our Lord, the people wanted to make him king in Israel. As he rode into Jerusalem, a great multitude met him waving palm branches, and crying, *“Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!”* But our Savior passed through the streets of the ancient city in humility, riding an ass’s colt, just as the prophet Zechariah had prophesied he would. This public manifestation, the well-known miracles, the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, and the general talk of the people stirred the interests of many. Many strangers began to ask questions about this man who was called *“the Christ.”*

Certain Greeks asked Philip to introduce them to the Master, saying, *“Sir, we would see Jesus”* (v. 21). Obviously, these men did not simply desire to see the Savior physically. They could do that without Philip’s assistance. These Greeks wanted to know the Christ of whom they had heard so much.

The sight of these Greeks must have brought joy to the Savior’s heart. Here were men coming out of great darkness to him who is the Light of the world. These were Gentiles seeking their Savior. No doubt, he saw in these men a reminder of that which he had come to accomplish: the salvation of his elect out of the nations of the world. He must have looked upon these strangers with delight, regarding them as representatives of the countless multitudes who would come to him from the ends of the earth and the islands of the seas to behold the glory of God in his face. How his heart must have laughed with joy! This was the joy set before him, for which he was about to endure the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2).

Then, as he began to address the crowds before him, a solemn thought seems to have seized his holy mind. He seems to have thought to himself — *“Multitudes are to be gathered unto me. Both Jew and Gentile shall be saved by me. But they cannot be born into my kingdom without my soul’s travail. They cannot be saved except I satisfy the justice of God for them. These people cannot live except I die and redeem them with my life’s precious blood.”*

It appears that this fact came vividly before the Savior’s heart and mind. It seems to have rushed upon his holy soul like a raging storm. He saw that he could not become the seed of a great harvest until he first fell into the ground and died. That is what he says in verse twenty-four. He was and is that one grain of wheat upon whom all depended. He must be slain and buried in the earth, or else he must abide alone and have no fruit. Apart from his death as our Substitute there is no way for the holy Lord God to save fallen, guilty sinners. Justice must be satisfied, or sinners could never be saved.

Our Savior saw the vicarious sufferings he must endure as the sinner’s Substitute, how that he must be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; and his soul was exceedingly troubled. He said in verse twenty-seven, *“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.”*

Yet, we must never imagine that our Savior feared and dreaded death. Obviously, the Son of God did not fear death. His courage and strength of mind were infinitely superior to that possessed by any of his servants, many of whom have welcomed death. We have read of many of the martyrs who endured death in the most terrifying forms imaginable without fear, even expressing delight and glorifying God in their mortal agony. I have seen many of God’s saints leave this world, welcoming death as a blessed thing. Our Lord was not less courageous or weaker than they.

He did not fear death; but his was to be a very peculiar death. Death is the penalty for sin; but he knew no sin. Death is the curse of God’s broken law; but he never broke the law. Death is the out-pouring of divine

wrath upon fallen man; but he is the delight of his Father's heart. Death had no claim upon him. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

The Son of God died as the Sin-bearer. His death was the vindication of God's holiness and the satisfaction of his justice. Our Lord Jesus Christ died voluntarily as our Sacrifice and sin-atonement Substitute. He died in the place of sinners, being made sin, being made the object of his Father's holy wrath and furious justice.

This is altogether different from the death that we must die as pardoned, justified believers. We shall have the privilege of passing out of this world resting upon the atonement of Christ, sustained with the confidence that we are reconciled to God by the blood of the cross. Our Lord Jesus died bearing the enormous load of our guilt! The dark hue of human corruption, sin, and guilt must soon blacken his holy soul! He must be made sin for us! His sinless, sensitive, holy soul must be made guilty before his Father!

When we die, our death is precious in the eyes of the Lord. When Christ died, his death was peculiarly and distinctly cursed by God (Galatians 3:13). He died the cursed death of the cross that all the blessings of God's free grace might flow down to his redeemed people through the merits of his blood.

Not one of us can perceive the agony our Redeemer endured for us when he died in our place at Calvary. Yet, he saw it all clearly, even before it took place. He knew exactly what lay before him, what he must do, and what he must suffer, in order to "*see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.*"

Inward Struggle

When he began to anticipate the horror of bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, there was a struggle in his soul. That struggle was witnessed by the crowds gathered before him, and is here recorded by John for our learning.

The Greeks wanted to see the Lord Jesus; and see him they did. They saw him as no one had ever seen him. They saw him and heard him "*in the days of his flesh*" offering "*up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death.*" Yes, as the Spirit of God tells us in Hebrews 5:7, they saw the Lord Jesus Christ in fear. They must have been astonished by what they saw. They expected to see a King; and they did behold his royal soul; but they saw him in a depth of grief that no words can describe. They wanted to see the greatness of his spirit and the power of his mind. They did see it; but it was a greatness of spirit and a power of mind that filled the incarnate God with agony!

Gethsemane

On this public occasion, our Savior seems to have rehearsed that which later took place in Gethsemane. His soul was troubled. His heart was heavy. His spirit was in agony. In his inmost being, the Son of Man was going through a time of deep, deep distress and great trouble. Our text is the culminating point of his trouble, the climax of his anguish, and the conquest of his soul over his distress. — "*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.*"

When he had spoken those words, reminding himself of his purpose in life to accomplish the will of God, he seems to have shaken himself free of fear. He emerged victorious, with his face set like a flint, he was determined to go forward to the bitter, but glorious end. This was his prayer, his motive, his rule of life, and the desire of his heart and soul in all things and at all times. — "*Father, glorify thy name.*"

Using our Savior's own words and example, let us understand that as the glory of God is the ultimate end of all things, it ought to be the constant motive and ambition and desire of our hearts in all things. Our Lord

Jesus Christ sought the glory of God above all else. May he give us grace to walk in his steps. This was his prayer when his soul was troubled. This is my prayer. It is the daily cry of my heart to my God. I trust it is yours as well. — *“Father, glorify thy name.”*

A Prayer of Faith

Here is a prayer of faith. — *“Father, glorify thy name.”* — Our Lord Jesus Christ, above all others, lived in this world by faith, believing God. His faith in God was exemplified in his perfect faithfulness to God in all things as a man. Both his faith and his faithfulness are displayed in this prayer.

This is a prayer that arose from our Savior’s great trouble of soul as a man. I am always fearful when I try to speak about the inner conflicts of our Redeemer’s holy soul. Jealousy for his honor makes me reluctant to speak of such things. Yet, this event and this prayer are recorded here by Divine Inspiration for our learning.

Our Savior’s great soul was full of trouble. His heart was heavy. Here is God the Son, the Savior of the world, bowed down with woe. His mind, his soul, his heart in conflict vexed him. He who could heal diseases with the touch of his hand, cast out demons with a word, calm the raging sea and tempestuous winds, and call the dead back to life again is in agony! How can such a thing as this be explained?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger...The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.”
(Lamentations 1:12, 14)

He knew what lay before him in Gethsemane. He knew what Judas was about to do. He knew how Peter would deny him. He knew how his disciples would all forsake him. He knew that he must soon be made sin for us. The weight of our sins began to press upon his soul. Our Redeemer knew full well what he must suffer for his elect. He knew that all the sins of all his people must be transferred to him and made his. He knew that all the fury of God’s justice and wrath must be completely poured out and fully exhausted upon him. He knew that he must be abandoned by his Father at the very apex of his obedience, when he would be made sin for us.

I find here both a deep mystery and a comforting truth. Though our Savior suffered trouble and fear, he knew no sin. There was trouble in his soul, but no doubt in his heart, fear, but no fretting or cowardice, distress, but no despair, sorrow, but no unbelief.

Our Savior entered into our manhood fully. He experienced everything we experience, every trial, every temptation, and every heartache. Though he knew no sin and did no sin, though he was altogether without sin, he was now about to be made sin for us. If he would be our merciful and faithful High Priest, if he would be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, if he would be able to succor them that are tempted, he must be made sin for us (Hebrew 2:9-10, 17-18). Blessed be his name, our all-glorious Christ is a merciful and faithful, sympathizing High Priest, in all things touched with the feeling of our infirmities!

Our Redeemer overcame his great trouble of soul with the determination of his committed, consecrated heart. — *“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. Father, glorify thy name.”* The time of his suffering and sorrow had been appointed for him; and he knew it. *“The hour is come.”* He had come to Jerusalem specifically because his hour had come. The hour appointed to him by the Father’s decree, the hour agreed to in the covenant of grace (John 10:16-18), the hour for which he came into the world (Hebrews 10:5-10) had arrived. Our Lord Jesus Christ was determined to suffer all the wrath of God for us at the appointed hour (Isaiah 50:5-7).

In Matthew 27:34 we read “*They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*” This mixture may have been given by his tormentors to intoxicate and stupefy him, to prolong his sufferings, and to aggravate his agony. John Gill tells us that “This potion of vinegar with gall, was an aggravating circumstance in our Lord’s sufferings, being given to him when he had a violent thirst upon him; and was an emblem of the bitter cup of God’s wrath, he had already tasted of in the garden, and was about to drink up.”

Be sure you understand how Christ died. He did not die as a helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control, but as a voluntary, vicarious, victorious Redeemer and Substitute (John 10:16-18). The cause of our Lord’s holy determination is evident. Why was he resolved to die? Was it to save men? Indeed, it was. Yet, that was not the chief reason. His prayer here is not, “Father, save thy people,” but “*Father, glorify thy name.*” This is what I want us to see: The primary object of our Savior’s life, that which inspired, motivated, and invigorated his holy soul, was and is the glory of the Father. He came into the world for the glory of his Father. He lived here for the glory of his Father. He died at Calvary for the glory of his Father. He reigns upon his throne for the glory of his Father. He saves sinners for the glory of his Father.

A Promise from God

Here is a promise from God. — “*Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*” — The grand result of our Savior’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation is the glory of God. Here the Father speaks from heaven both of the past and the future.

Three times, during the days of our Lord’s earthly life and ministry, we hear the Father speak from heaven. All three times, the issue at hand was the death of Christ his Son as our Substitute: at his baptism (Matthew 3), at his transfiguration (Matthew 17), and here in John 12. In all that past, our heavenly Father declares that he has glorified himself. Without a doubt, the primary thing declared here is that the Father was glorified in all things done by the Son. The glory of the Father is always in the Son; and the glory of the Son is always in the Father (John 13:31-32). Therefore, we are assured by Christ himself that all who honor the Son honor the Father also (John 5:20-24). God’s primary purpose in all things is his own glory (Psalms 106:8; Proverbs 16:4; Romans 11:36; Revelation 4:11).

God glorified himself in the covenant of grace. God glorified himself in the creation of the world. He glorified himself in all the laws and ceremonies and events of Old Testament history. He glorified himself in the incarnation and birth of his Son. God glorified himself in the life of his Son upon the earth. Christ is the Revelation of the Triune God. Christ is the Embodiment of the Triune God. Christ is the Fulness of the Triune God. Christ is the Glory of God. Jesus Christ, the Man, is himself God!

Yet, here, the Father also speaks to the Son a word of promise, saying, “*I will glorify my name again.*” — This promise filled our Savior with joy and courage. Let it do the same for you. Is your soul downcast? Are you concerned about the future? Hear the promise of God and take comfort. — “*I will glorify it again.*”

God’s name was glorified in and by the death of his Son as our Substitute. When we read the context carefully, we cannot fail to see that the glory of God is vitally connected with the cross of Christ. Sin was judged at Calvary. Satan was bound at Calvary. God’s elect were redeemed at Calvary. The crucified Christ draws sinners to himself. All the attributes of God meet together and are honored in the cross (Psalms 85:9-13).

“The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” (John 12:29-33)

God's name was glorified by our Savior's resurrection and ascension (Psalms 68:18-20). God's name is glorified in Christ by the preaching of the gospel (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). God's name is glorified in the salvation of sinners by Christ (Ephesians 2:7-9). And, blessed be his name, there is a day coming when God almighty will glorify his name in and by all things. Christ will come again with the glory of the Father. All men will bow to and confess Christ as Lord to the glory of God (Philippians 2:8-11). The earth shall be filled with the glory of God, when Christ makes all things new. The wicked will be judged and forever damned for the glory of God. The righteous will be saved, forever saved, for the glory of God. And all things will be reconciled to God by our great Savior "*to the praise of the glory of his grace!*"

If I am in Christ, if you are in him, we may take this word in the most personal way possible, applying it to ourselves in every detail of our lives. In all that is past, God has glorified himself. In all that shall come, our God will glorify himself.

A Principle of Grace

Here is a principle of grace. This is the principle by which our Savior lived in this world. It is the principle by which we should always strive to live. — "*Father, glorify thy name.*" Let this ever be the prayer, desire, ambition, and governing principle of our lives in this world. — "*Father, glorify thy name*" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Seek his will. Surrender to his will. Trust his will. Delight in his will.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Then, let us live in the expectation of his promise being fulfilled. — "*I will glorify it again.*" This is our confidence, our hope, and our ultimate satisfaction. — "*I will glorify it again.*"

Would you glorify God? Are you interested in the glory of God? Let me give you four simple words of direction. Do these four things, and you will glorify the name of God.

1. Trust Christ.
1. Follow Christ.
2. Live for the Honor of Christ.
3. Serve Christ.

With the dawn of every day, as we anticipate that which lies before us in the providence of God, may God the Holy Spirit make this our souls' ambition, desire, and prayer. — "*Father, glorify thy name.*"

“Who is this Son of Man?”

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The 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? who is this Son of man?” (John 12:31-34)

In Holy Scripture, our Lord Jesus is called “*the Son of Mary*” only once (Mark 6:3). Truly, he is the Son of Mary, the woman’s Seed, conceived in the womb of the virgin by God the Holy Spirit, without an earthly father. We rejoice to know that. But the only time our Lord was ever called “*the Son of Mary*,” he was called that by godless, reprobate men, who were offended by his doctrine. That fact should speak volumes to us about that idolatrous religion that promotes the worship of Mary, ever referring to God our Savior as “*the Son of Mary*.”

Our Redeemer is called “*the Son of David*” sixteen times. He is called the Son of David, because he was directly descended from David as a man. Being David’s Son, it was his lawful right to sit upon David’s throne as the king of Israel. Indeed, he is that Son of David whom God promised to raise up to set upon his throne forever. The Son of David has come. He is now reigning upon his throne, the King of God’s Israel, the King of glory forever.

Then, our blessed Savior is called “*the Son of God*” forty-seven times. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, the baby of Bethlehem, the Son of David, is himself the Son of God, the second Person of the holy Trinity. Our Savior is God. Were he anything less than God over all, blessed forever, he could not be our Savior. Because he is God the Son, he is God our Savior.

But in the Book of God the Lord Jesus Christ is called “*the Son of Man*” eighty-eight times. This is the name he used in reference to himself more than any other. In fact, this name, “*The Son of Man*,” is used almost exclusively by Christ himself. Yet, none of his disciples ever called him “the Son of Man” until after his exaltation, and then only two of them did so. Stephen, when he saw heaven opened, said — “*Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*” (Acts 7:56). John, in the Book of Revelation, wrote, “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle* (Revelation 1:13).” — Then, in chapter 14, verse 14, we read, “*And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*”

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ constantly refer to himself as “*the Son of Man*”? How can he be both the Son of God and the Son of Man? When our Savior spoke in John 12:34 of the Son of man being lifted up to suffer and die, and yet declared that by means of his death he would save men and women throughout the world, the people who heard it were confused. — “*The people answered him, we have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever.*” You say that you are the Christ, the Messiah. “*And how sayest thou, the Son of man must be lifted up*” to die upon the cursed tree?

“*Who is this Son of man?*” To find the answer to this question, we must search the Scriptures, taking the Word of God alone as our source of information, asking God the Holy Spirit, whose Word the Bible is, to be our Teacher. — As it is used in the New Testament, the term “*Son of man*” never refers to anyone except the God-man, our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. This term, “*The Son of man*,” always refers to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and men.

Hear the Savior

“*Who is this Son of man?*” — *First*, let the Son of man himself tell us who he is. Of the eighty-eight times this term, “*the Son of man,*” is used in the New Testament, eighty-four times it was uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ in reference to himself. Who better than he can tell us who he is?

“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. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. 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 *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. 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. 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. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” (John 5:19-27)

In these verses our Lord calls himself “*the Son,*” “*the Son of God,*” and “*the Son of man.*” This alone is enough to assure us that there is no contradiction between the titles “*Son of God*” and “*Son of man.*” Both names refer to the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The one refers to his divinity and the other to his humanity. Our Savior is both God and man, as truly God as though he were not man, and as truly man as though he were not God, the Godman.

John 6:62 — “*What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?*” (See John 17:1-5). The Lord Jesus here declares that he existed in heaven as the Son of man before he came into the world in our nature. Though his human body and soul were created in time, he was the Son of man, our Mediator, the Surety of the everlasting covenant from eternity. He was, in the mind and purpose of God, the Son of man before any man was made. He says to the Father, — “*My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect (unmade, uncreated); and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them*” (Psalm 139:15-16).

John 3:13 — Our Savior said to Nicodemus, “*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.*” Even while he was upon the earth, in human flesh, the Son of man was the omnipresent Son of God. His humanity, his physical form, can only be in one place at a time. Yet, he is God, everywhere present at all times. Our Mediator, the Son of Man, is the Lord, Jehovah, our God, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. This One who is the Son of man is God, the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). He is the Son of man and the Son of God, who has power on earth to forgive sin (Luke 5:17-26).

Matthew 25:31 — “*The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*” The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. The Son of man came to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. The Son of man lived for us. The Son of man died for us. The Son of man arose, ascended back into heaven, and sat down in glorious exaltation on our behalf. The Son of man is making intercession for us. The Son of man rules the world for us. The Son of man has opened a way of access to God for sinful men, by the blood of his cross. The Son of man is coming again in glory. The Son of man is our Savior. And the Son of man is the Son of God!

Hear His Disciples

“*Who is this Son of man?*” — We’ve heard the Savior answer the question. Now, *secondly*, let’s hear what his disciples have said about him. Whenever our Lord’s disciples thought of him as the Son of man, or heard him call himself by that name, they never looked upon it as a pretty title, implying only that he was a good man, a prophet, a miracle worker or a social reformer. To the disciples, this title, “*the Son of man,*” implied authority, exaltation, glory, power, dominion, and tenderness.

The Apostle Peter certainly understood the title, “*the Son of Man,*” to be a title just as noble, honorable, and distinct as the title “*the Son of God.*” When the Lord Jesus called himself “*the Son of God,*” Peter called him “*the Son of Man;*” and the Savior took Peter’s confession as an honor done to him by Peter (Matthew 16:13-17).

The writer of Hebrews used this title, “*the Son of Man,*” to ascribe glory to Christ, the Son of God (Hebrews 1:1-3, 6-9; 2:6-9). Stephen, the first martyr, saw the Lord Jesus standing as “*the Son of Man*” at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54-59).

“*Who is this Son of man?*” — His disciples tell us that he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. His disciples tell us that he is the exalted, sovereign Savior of the sons of Abraham, God’s elect, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, able to help us, always delighted to call us his brethren, determined to save us. His disciple, Stephen, that blessed martyr, tells us that he is a faithful friend and our faithful God!

Hear His Enemies

“*Who is this Son of man?*” — Let us now consult with his enemies, and hear what they have to say. Our great God, in his wise and adorable providence, makes even the enemies of his Son to be witnesses for his Son. In this passage (John 12:31-34) the Jews understood that the Messiah would be called “*the Son of man*” (See Psalm 80:17; Daniel 7:13-14). Those who raised this question, “*Who is this Son of Man?*” looked upon the terms “*Son of God*” and “*Son of man*” as synonymous terms. When they heard the Lord of glory call himself the “*Son of man,*” they understood his meaning to be, “I am God.” Therefore, they crucified him (Matthew 26:63-67). When they said, “*Thou, being a man, makest thyself God*” (John 10:33), the Lord Jesus replied, “*Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?*” (John 10:36).

“*Who is this Son of man?*” — He is God over all and blessed forever. And he is man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. There is no lack of efficacy in his blood and no lack of power in his grace. He can save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. Trust him and you will find his grace sufficient for you.

Ten Reasons

Still the question needs to be answered, “Why is the Lord Jesus Christ called ‘*the Son of man?*’” To the best of my very limited ability I have shown you who the Son of man is. Now, let me show you ten reasons the Lord of glory is called “*the Son of man.*”

1. Christ is called the Son of man because he is the original Man. — Our Lord Jesus Christ is the man who is the image of the invisible God, in whose image and after whose likeness man was made in the beginning. God created Adam in the image of Christ, that man who was to come, who is the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). Adam was created and made in the physical image of our Redeemer, his moral and intellectual image, and in his authoritative image, having dominion over all creation. And the first Adam was made in the mediatorial image of the last Adam, our divine Mediator.
2. The Lord Jesus is called the Son of man because he is the representative Man. — He is the last Adam, the second Man, the Lord from heaven; as such he is distinguished from the first man, the first Adam, who was

of the earth, earthy (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47). In all things Christ is the Surety, the Representative, the Mediator, the Substitute of an elect race, just as Adam was the representative of all our physical race in the garden (Romans 5:12-19).

3. Our Savior is called the Son of man because he is the prophesied Man. — He is the man of whom all the prophets spoke, the man who is God's equal (Psalm 89:19; Isaiah 9:6; 32:2; 53:1-12; Zechariah 13:7).
4. The Lord Jesus Christ is called the Son of man because he is the ideal Man. — He is the only man who ever perfectly fulfilled God's will, and fulfilled the purpose of God in creating man. That purpose was and is threefold: To Live in Righteousness, To Glorify God, To Have Dominion over God's Creation. In Christ we fulfill God's purpose for manhood (Genesis 1:26-28).
5. Our Redeemer is called the Son of man because he is the justice satisfying Man. — No mortal could ever satisfy the justice of God. Not all the race of manhood could satisfy God's offended justice for sin. But the Son of man, with one tremendous draft of love, drank damnation dry, when he suffered the wrath of God in our place (Isaiah 53:9; Ephesians 5:2).
6. Christ Jesus is called the Son of man because he is the exalted Man (Philippians 2:9-11).

“The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now.
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow!”

7. Our great Savior is called the Son of man because he is the Godman.

God could not suffer. God could not die.
And man could never satisfy.
But Christ, the God-man suffered and died.
And He God's justice satisfied!

8. The Lord Jesus is called the Son of man because he is the saving Man. The Son of man is the Savior of men. — *“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). Christ Jesus is called the Son of man because he is the coming Man. — *“The Son of man cometh”* (Matthew 24:44; 25:13; Luke 12:40; 18:8) to save his own, to judge the world, and to finish his mediatorial work (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).
9. And our dear Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is called the Son of man because he is the sympathizing Man (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15; 5:2; 7:25).

“A Man there is, a real Man,
With wounds still gaping wide,
From which rich streams of blood once ran,
In hands, and feet, and side.

‘Tis no wild fancy of our brains,
No metaphor we speak,
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns
That suffered for our sake.

This wondrous Man of whom I tell,

Is the almighty God;
He bought our souls from death and hell;
The price, His own heart's blood.

That human heart He still retains,
Though throned in highest bliss;
And feels each tempted member's pains;
For our affliction's His.

Come, then, repenting sinner, come,
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death.

His blood can cleanse the blackest soul,
And wash our guilt and sin away;
He will present us sound and whole,
In that tremendous day!"

—Joseph Hart

10. Why is Christ called the Son of man? He is called the Son of man so that lost men might look to him, the God-man, for grace and life, and believing men might look to him, the God-man, for comfort and peace.

Chapter 87
Responsibility, Reprobation, Ruin

“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

(John 12:35-43)

Soon, we must meet God in judgment! — You know it; and I know it. Soon, very soon, we will stand before the holy Lord God in judgment. We are going to spend eternity somewhere, either in the everlasting torments of the wicked in hell, or in the everlasting bliss of the saints in heaven, either with the damned under the infinite wrath of God, or with the saved in the indescribable blessedness of God’s goodness; but we will spend eternity somewhere. You know it; and I know it (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

When Christ ascends His judgment throne,
And bids all worlds draw near;
Men’s hearts shall melt, with sighs and groans;
And trembling souls shall fear. —
Then as the solemn, opened books
Disclose the dreadful day;
Jehovah’s frowns and angry looks
Will wicked souls dismay.

Omniscience will, with truth, expose
Their secret thoughts to view;
Their crimes God’s justice will expose,
And conscience own them true.
God’s wrath shall seize the guilty souls
Of unconverted men,
While all God’s books, the judgment scrolls,
Accuse, convince, condemn!

But, there in Jesus’ gracious hand,
The Book of Life is placed.
The names of His elect there stand,
Nor can they be erased!
As He unfolds the sacred seals,
With God’s decrees all done,
With one decisive word, He will
Welcome His ransomed home!

If you and I are saved, if we go to heaven, if the Lord God receives us into his Kingdom, if we enter into the everlasting bliss of heaven’s glory with Christ, it will be by the work and grace of the Triune God alone. —

“Salvation is of the LORD!” Salvation comes to sinners by the will, decree, and purpose of God the Father, the righteousness, redemption, and intercession of God the Son, and the regeneration, calling, and preservation of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10).

If we perish in our sins, if we die without Christ, without God’s salvation, without hope, if we go to hell and suffer the horrid wrath of God in the pit of the damned forever, it will be our own fault. We will have no one to blame, but ourselves; and we will blame ourselves forever! It is written, *“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). Everlasting death in hell is something we earn. Eternal life is the free gift of God to poor sinners in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to show from the Scriptures, and particularly from this passage of Scripture, that it is our responsibility to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and that if you refuse to trust the Son of God, your willful, obstinate unbelief will be the just cause of your everlasting damnation.

Responsibility

First, in verses 35-36, our Savior shows us that it is our responsibility to believe on his name, to trust him as our only God, our only Lord, and our only Savior.

“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.”

I take a back seat to no one in declaring the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. Divine sovereignty, absolute predestination, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints are in our house of worship like salt and pepper on the table. We never have a meal without them. These are not things discussed only in the secrecy of the pastor’s study. They are openly declared from the pulpit without apology or abatement. Arminianism is a heretical form of evil that cannot be denounced in terms too severe. Will worship, under any name or in any form, is damning to the souls of men, and must be denounced with absolute dogmatism. However, we must not distort the truth of God and the plain teachings of Holy Scripture, even in denouncing the heresies of Arminian, free-will, works religion.

Many, attempting to guard the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, completely deny the responsibility of men. They reason, as one wrote a while back, — “If we preach that a sinner is responsible to repent, we must declare that he is able to repent. If we teach that sinners are responsible to believe on Christ, we must also teach that they are able to believe.” They deduce, in what appears to be a very reasonable and logical manner, that responsibility implies ability. The problem with this reasoning is that it attempts to mold the Word of God to a theological system; and that we dare not do!

We must never try to make the Word of God fit into any humanly devised system of doctrine or theology. We must build our doctrine upon the plain statements of Holy Scripture alone. If the plain statements of Scripture contradict, or even destroy our theological system, so be it. If we have to throw away every doctrinal creed, every confession of faith, and every catechism that has ever been written by men in order to be faithful and true to the Word of God, then let us throw them away.

This is one reason why, in our congregation, we do not require members to sign or agree to a confession of faith. Our creed, our confession of faith is the holy, inspired Word of God. If that seems to others to be too simple, too non-intellectual, or too pietistic, we can live with their disapproval. We bow to and build our doctrine upon the Word of God alone, even when it seems to contradict human reason and philosophy. — *“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).

Here are two facts which simply cannot be denied or refuted:

1. God almighty is absolutely sovereign in salvation. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy. He is gracious to whom he will be gracious. He saves whom he will. — *"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"* (Romans 9:16).
2. All men are responsible under God to walk in the light he gives them. The Lord God has fixed it so that those who perish in their sins, those who die in rebellion and unbelief are altogether without excuse. No one goes to hell by accident. Unbelief is not a passive thing. If you go to hell, you will have to scratch and claw your way there, fighting to your last breath against the light God has given you. Men and women do not go to hell because they are ignorant. People go to hell because they are rebels (Romans 1:18-20). — *"The wages of sin is death."* You earn that. — *"But the gift of God is eternal life."* That is his work.

"Yet a little while is the light with you." — Christ is the Light. The gospel he preached is the light. The revelation of his Divine person and work is the light. But that light, he declared, would be taken away. Certainly, this primarily refers to his own death, resurrection, and ascension. He was about to go back to the Father. When that happened, judicial blindness was sent upon the nation of Israel by the judgment of God upon them.

But that is not all that our Lord's words mean. They have meaning for us as well. Our Lord Jesus is telling us that the light he gives us in this world is light that is given only for a specific space of time. He has given us the light of his grace and glory revealed in the gospel; but the light will not always shine before us. The Lord Jesus says, *"Yet a little while is the light with you."*

"Walk while ye have the light." — When our Lord says, *"Walk while ye have the light,"* his meaning is *"Believe in the light, while ye have the light,"* as he states in verse 36. — *"While ye have light, believe in the light."* Soon we must die; and there is no light of grace in the grave.

This is to you who read these lines the day of grace and salvation. There may not be another. God may never speak to you again by his gospel, by his Spirit, or by the voice of his servant. The darkness of old age, senility, gospel-hardness, false religion, and false refuges leave a people only to stumble about in confusion and darkness, with no light. — *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!"*¹ When the light is taken away, darkness comes; and when the darkness of God's judgment comes upon you, you cannot walk in the light. When God sends darkness, he sends darkness; and you cannot see. — Oh, how great is that darkness!

"So it is with a man in a state of unregeneracy, and more especially under judicial blindness. He is not aware of the pits and snares that lie in his way, or of the dark mountains on which he stumbles; and though destruction and misery are in his ways, he knows not that he is going thereunto." — *John Gill*

"While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them." Our Lord then departed from them and hid himself, leaving them to their thoughts and ways. — *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* When the Light leaves, nothing remains but darkness. This will be the torment of the damned forever: — They loved darkness rather than the Light. Therefore they inherit the darkness of hell. God give me grace to believe the Light, to walk in the Light

¹ Oh, what a privilege it is to have the light of the gospel, to have a place to hear the gospel, to have a messenger from God to preach the gospel! — God can take the light away in a moment!

of Christ, the light of his purpose, his presence, his providence, and his gospel.

The galling, tormenting remembrance of lost and misspent opportunities will be the very essence of hell!

Reprobation

The Scriptures clearly teach both election and reprobation. Reprobation is the act of abandoning, or state of being abandoned, to eternal destruction. It is a term applied both to the eternal decree of God to punish all who die in unbelief, and to the judicial act of God in abandoning, or casting off those who refuse to walk in the light God gives them, who refuse to believe the gospel, who refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures speak of God giving men over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28). That is God's act of judgment, casting men off, shutting them up in unbelief, because they harden their hearts against him (Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1; Romans 10:21). When God shuts the door, it is shut forever.

The Scriptures also speak of reprobation as an eternal act of God in predestination (Romans 9:11-24; 1 Peter 2:7-8; Jude 1:4). Just as there are vessels of mercy "*afore prepared unto glory*," there are vessels of wrath "*fitted to destruction*."

Our Lord Jesus speaks of both eternal reprobation by the decree of God and judicial reprobation by the justice of God in our text, in verses 37-41. Reprobation is both the decree of God in eternity and the judicial act of God in time. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart; but Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart was the cause of God judgment upon him (Exodus 8:32-9:3). So it is with all who are lost.

"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."

Be sure you do not miss the order in which God the Holy Spirit dictated these statements of Inspiration. The order here given is very significant. 1st We are told that those before whom our Lord had performed so many miracles would not believe (v. 37). 2nd The Spirit of God refers us to Isaiah 53:1, and tells us that the unbelief of these people was a fulfilment of Divine prophecy (v. 38). Their unbelief did not take God by surprise, or nullify his purpose. Rather, their unbelief was the fulfilment of God's purpose (Romans 3:3-4). 3rd Because they would not believe, we are told that the Lord God fixed it so that they could not believe. — "*Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them*" (vv. 39-40). God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts in retribution, a just retribution and judgment, for their unbelief. And this was all according to God's eternal purpose. 4th In verse 41 John tells us that Isaiah had this revealed to him when he saw the Lord's glory, when he saw redemption accomplished, Christ exalted, free forgiveness by the accepted sacrifice of Christ, sovereign mercy, and justice executed (Isaiah 6:1-13).

How hardened in rebellion the heart of man is by nature, how deceitful, how desperately wicked! Though numerous, undeniable miracles were performed before their eyes, they would not believe. They would not believe because they could not believe; and they could not believe because they would not believe. Miracles performed before the eyes of men, undeniable miracles, will never produce faith. Faith comes by hearing the gospel, not by signs and wonders. Yet, the most orthodox, perfect, pure preaching of the gospel will not produce faith without the accompanying power and grace of God the Holy Spirit. — "*It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the*

flesh profiteth nothing!” The dead must be given life before they can believe. Even then, the faith we exercise as living men is, as Paul puts it, “*the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20). Our faith is the work of God in us, not our work for God. Faith in Christ is the gift of and operation of God’s free and sovereign grace (Ephesians 1:19-20; 2:8; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 2:14).

All things that come to pass in time, even the rebellion, unbelief, and everlasting ruin of reprobate sinners is according to the unalterable, everlasting purpose of God in predestination (Romans 9:11-24; 1 Peter 2:7-8; Jude 1:4; Romans 3:3-4). Yet, Divine judgment is always just. It is always the just retribution of God upon ungodly rebels. It comes upon men because of deliberate, willful rebellion and unbelief. — “*The wages of sin is death!*” If you go to hell, it will be your own fault; and you will forever be tormented by your own conscience screaming “Amen” to your everlasting damnation.

No one goes to hell because of Adam’s transgression. — “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:20). No one goes to hell who does not personally deserve eternal damnation. God will not condemn the just (Proverbs 17:15). If you go to hell, you will go to hell kicking, fighting, opposing, and warring with your own conscience all the way, transgressing everything you know by nature, providence, and the Word of God. You will go to hell kicking God, as it were, out of your way, with your fingers in your ears, deliberately hardening your heart against everything holy, pure, and spiritual. Still, you will not escape, alter, or in any way hinder God’s eternal purpose and decree in predestination. You will only fulfil it! When Isaiah saw the Lord’s glory (Isaiah 6), he saw his glory both in the salvation of chosen, ransomed sinners by his free grace, and in the everlasting ruin of reprobate sons and daughters of Adam who harden their hearts and will not believe on the Son of God.

Ruin

Third, in verses 42 and 43, we see that religion without Christ is the ruin of multitudes.

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

These men were fully convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They believed; but they did not believe. They had a faith about Christ, but no faith in Christ. Their heads were forced to acknowledge truth; but their hearts could not receive the love of the truth.

Reason, and intellect, and mind, and conscience forced them secretly to admit that no man could do the miracles Jesus of Nazareth did, unless God was with him, and that the preacher of Nazareth really was the Christ of God. But they would not confess him. They would not identify themselves with Christ, his gospel, and his people. They dared not face the ridicule and persecution, which confessing Christ might entail. Like the cowards they were, they held their peace and kept their convictions to themselves.

What was the reason for this cowardice? — “*They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God!*” What multitudes there are like these! What will it take to overcome this love of the praise of men? What will it take to melt a sinner’s hard heart? What will it take to bring proud rebels to their knees before God? What will it take to make sinners “*believe in the Light, that they may be children of the Light?*”

This I know: — If God leaves us to ourselves, we will never walk in the Light, we will never trust the Lord Jesus, we will never obey the command of the gospel, which we are responsible to obey. The only way any sinner will ever believe on the Son of God, the only way any child of darkness will ever walk in the Light is if, like Isaiah of old, God Almighty gives that sinner the saving revelation of his grace and glory in Christ. O Lord God, force yourself upon poor, needy sinners. Show us your glory, and sweetly force us to walk in the

Light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Chapter 88
“His Commandment is Life Everlasting”

“Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”(John 12:44-50)

He who is God is the King, your King, the King of the universe. His message is not a suggestion, or an offer, or even an opportunity. His message, God’s word to you, is a command. — “*And*”, the Lord Jesus declares, “*I know that his commandment is life everlasting!*” I call your attention to seven things in our Savior’s declaration in this portion of Holy Scripture.

1. **Faith in Christ is faith in God** (. 44). — “*Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.*”

Faith in Christ is faith in God; and there is no faith in God except faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Any other pretended faith in God is a damning delusion. He has no faith in God, who does not trust the Lord Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior. Righteousness, atonement, salvation, and life are found only in Christ.

In this passage our Lord Jesus is describing, for the very last time, to the Jewish nation who he is and what he came into this world to do as the God-man Mediator. He is not talking about himself as God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Neither is he talking about himself merely as a man. Rather, he here speaks of himself as the God-man, Immanuel, our Mediator, Jehovah’s righteous Servant.

“*Jesus cried with a loud voice,*” speaking distinctly and clearly, that he might be heard, leaving the Jewish nation and people (the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and religious lawyers), without excuse. He cried with a loud voice, expressing both the bold earnestness and openness with which our Savior preached to men. He spoke to be heard and understood. His words were so plain that they could not be mistaken.

“*He that believeth on me, believeth not on me.*” — Obviously, these words are not to be understood in an absolute sense, for that would be a contradiction in terms. We who believe in Christ do believe in him personally; and it is right for us to believe in him. Christ is the object of all true faith. It is Christ who is set before us in the Gospel. It is the Father’s will and counsel that we believe in his Son. We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the sent one of the Triune God. Thus, believing him, we believe God; and our faith in him is our assurance that we are born of God and taught of God (John 6:45; 1 John 2:22-23; 1 John 4:2, 15; 5:1).

“*He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.*” — If an ambassador is sent by an earthly ruler to a foreign court, anything done to him is done to the one he represents. An affront to the ambassador of a king is an affront to the king. So it is with the Lord Jesus, the God-man, as Jehovah’s Servant. If we despise Christ, we despise God. If we receive Christ, we receive God. If we refuse to believe Christ, we make the Triune God a liar. If you believe Christ, you believe the Triune Jehovah.

2. **The Lord Jesus Christ is the invisible God made visible** (v. 45). — “*And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.*”

What a wonderful statement! We may never fully realize it. Christ is the seeable God. God is not visible; but when we see the Christ, we see all of God. The invisible God made himself visible in Christ. — “*For God was*

in Christ reconciling the world to himself” — “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9-10).

But our Savior is not talking about seeing him with the natural eye. Multitudes saw him physically, who never saw and never knew God. They saw nothing divine in him. When our Savior talks about people seeing him, he is talking about seeing him with the God given eyes of the soul, the eyes of faith. To see him is to believe him. All who truly see Christ with an eye of faith, see his glory, as *“the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” “as the brightness of his Father’s glory,”* having the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him. Therefore, he declares, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:1, 6-10).

Faith in Christ is faith in the Triune God. To see Christ is to see God; for Christ is God incarnate, God made visible and knowable to man, God in our nature.

3. Faith in Christ, true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ sheds light upon everything (v. 46). — *“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”*

Faith in Christ sheds light on everything concerning which light is desirable. We are made to understand things when we believe in Christ. Until we believe, we understand nothing. It is no surprise to me that those who believe not doubt everything and question everything. They have no light. They walk in darkness. I do not expect them to see. But believers walk in the Light. And the Light in which we walk is Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the Light of faith. If you have no light, you cannot see. Faith in Christ sheds light on everything. — *“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Believers understand all things (Proverbs 28:5).

Other people are vexed and confused by the Word of God, the ways of God, and the works of God; but God’s saints understand all things. This is not a matter of supposition, but the plainest possible declaration of inspiration. — *“They that seek the Lord understand all things.”* The wise man tells us that, *“Evil men understand not judgment.”* Then he asserts, *“but they that seek the Lord understand all things.”* I do not suggest that religious people understand all things; but the Lord God himself asserts that his people, all who know him by the saving operations of his grace, all who are born of God and taught of God, understand all things (1 Corinthians 2:12-16; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

Darkness to Light

Like all others, God’s elect, while in a state of unregeneracy and unbelief, are in darkness. When Christ shines in upon them and infuses the light of faith into them, they are no longer in darkness. The darkness is past and the true Light shines. In that true Light we see the light of the glory and grace of the Triune God in Christ. In and by Christ we see the invisible realities of the world to come. Walking in the light of his grace, we no longer walk in the darkness of sin, ignorance, and unbelief; but walk in the light of truth, faith, and holiness, until the perfect day comes, when all the shadows of remaining darkness will flee away.

Believers understand that the origin of all things is God. We understand that the end of all things is the salvation of God’s elect and the glory of his great name. God’s people understand that the nature of all things here is temporal. Everything here in this sin-cursed earth is temporal and vanishing. Every relationship in this world is just temporal.

Most importantly, those who are taught of God understand all things spiritual. This is what the Apostle John tells us. — *“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things”* (1 John 2:20). All who are born of God and taught of God have the mind of Christ and understand all things vital and necessary to the saving of their souls.

All Things in Salvation

All upon whom the Lord God shines the Light of his grace understand how God saves sinners in, by, and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice to know that salvation is and only can be by the purpose of God in unconditional election, the effectual accomplished redemption of God's elect by Christ's precious blood, and the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Ghost in regeneration and effectual calling.

Thanks for All Things

We understand that it is both the responsibility and the joy of believers to give thanks to God for all things. We are taught to give *"thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:20). In the context Paul is talking about walking in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit filled life is the life of a believer giving thanks to God. — *"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It is both our duty and our great privilege to give thanks to God always, and for all things. It glorifies God for us to praise him and give thanks to him. It breeds joy and peace in our own hearts and among our brethren for us to ever give thanks to God for all things.

Restitution of All Things

We also understand that there is a day coming called *"the restitution of all things"* (Acts 3:21). It is written, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* In that great and glorious day, when all things are brought to their final end, when time shall be no more, all things will glorify our God! Everything that has been, is now, or shall hereafter be, all things, all events, all creatures, and all the actions of all creatures, whether good or evil, will praise him, and will prove to have been good. Everything, even you and I, will glorify the triune God, one way or another. We will either glorify his grace in Christ in our everlasting salvation; or, like Pharaoh, we will glorify his power and wrath in our everlasting destruction; but we will all glorify God.

Inherit All Things

In Revelation 21:7 we read, *"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."* All true believers may rightfully sing, "We shall overcome some day!" We shall at last, by the grace of God, completely overcome sin and all its consequences. We shall in the end overcome this world, all its lusts, and all its charms, by the power and grace of our God. By God's free grace in Christ, we shall overcome Satan, too.

Many years ago, when my doctors thought I was about to die, and I was fairly certain that they were right, I got a card from a friend that lifted my spirit to heaven itself. It was totally blank, except for a Scripture reference. On the inside, my friend simply wrote the reference Romans 16:20. When I turned to it and read the text, my soul melted within me and leaped with joy in the realization of the promise contained in that text. If you are a believer, this is God's word to you. — *"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly!"* Then, we shall inherit all things, by the grace of God. We shall inherit all things with Christ, in Christ, and for Christ's sake.

End of All Things

We who are taught of God also understand that *"the end of all things is at hand"* (1 Peter 4:7). — *"Behold, he cometh!"* When our great and glorious Christ appears the second time, without sin, unto salvation, then the end

of all things will come: the end of all our troubles, the end of all our struggles, the end of all our toils, the end of all our trials, the end of all our temptations, the end of all our sorrows, the end of all our sins!

Done All Things Well

God's saints all understand this, too. — The Lord our God has done all things well! When the end of my days on this earth comes, when I look over my life's finished story, I am confident this will be my final word then. And when the end of all things has come, and time shall be no more, this will be the final word of all history (His-Story), and of all rational creatures: — *“He hath done all things well”* (Mark 7:37). This I declare now; and this I will declare in that great day, when time shall be no more. *“He hath done all things well”* with me and mine. *“He hath done all things well”* with his church. *“He hath done all things well”* with his world. *“He hath done all things well”* with you and yours.

4. **This is not the Day of Judgment, but the Day of Grace** (v. 47). — *“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”*

“If any man hear my words and believe not” — Men may hear the Gospel of Christ, and not understand it. They may understand it literally and grammatically, but understand nothing spiritually and experimentally. If that is the case, they do not believe, but rather reject and deny the Gospel. — Though faith comes by hearing, not all who hear are given faith (Hebrews 2:1-3).

“If any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” — At his first coming, the Lord Jesus did not appear as a judge, but as a Savior. He did not accuse, condemn, or judge men, but would leave them to another day, when righteous judgment shall take place.

This present dispensation is not the time of judgment. The Lord leaves the reprobate to themselves. He has not yet come to judge them. There is a second coming, a Day of Judgment, when he will be both Judge and Witness, and Condemner, of those who have rejected him; but this present Gospel Age is the Day of Grace (Ezekiel 33:11; Micah 7:18). — *“Behold, now is the accepted time! Behold, now is the Day of Salvation!”*

5. **There is a Day of Judgment appointed by God** (v. 48). — *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”*

The Gospel itself will judge the wicked at the last day. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the world, as the Apostle Paul said, *“according to my Gospel.”* — Those who are against the Gospel involve themselves in the most solemn condemnation. The greatest guilt is theirs; and the greatest punishment shall be theirs! The heathen, who perish without the Gospel, shall be damned by the witnesses of creation and nature, by the witness of the law written upon their own hearts and consciences. Those who had only the revelation of the Mosaic law shall be judged and damned by the witness of creation, conscience, and the law written upon tables of stone. But those who perish under the sound of the Gospel shall have the greater condemnation, being damned by the witness of creation, conscience, law, and the Gospel they choose to despise!

They have been favored with the revelation of the Gospel, but have rejected and denied it. That Gospel they despise will judge them at the last day. The Judge will act by its declaration, and according to that proceed, as it stands in Mark 16:16. — *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* The Gospel they have heard and despised will rise up in judgment against them. It will be their souls' relentless tormenter in hell forever!

For those who hear the Gospel, neutrality is impossible. Either we believe on Christ, trusting him for all righteousness, grace, atonement, salvation, sanctification, acceptance with God, and everlasting life, or we

reject him. — There is no middle ground. We either receive his words and trust him, or we trust in ourselves and despise him. We either enter in by Christ the Door, or we are still trying to come to God another way. Only the blood of Christ can satisfy Divine justice. Only the obedience of Christ can meet the demands of God for righteousness. Only the holy Christ can make sinners holy before God.

But if any do not believe, Christ is not the reason they are under condemnation. — He said, “*I came not to judge the world, but to save the world*” (John 3:17-18). Every sinner was already condemned when Christ came. Those who believe not were condemned before they ever began to hear the word of truth. Man’s wilful rejection of the Gospel and of Christ is but the outward display of his inward heart enmity toward God (John 3: 19-20).

All men do what their nature determines they will do. The natural man is conceived with an evil nature. Therefore, he does evil. He hates Christ the Light and will not come to Christ the Light, because he does not want his deeds, his very being, reprov’d as being evil. Confusion and shame will not allow him to admit that he is a sinner. The same confusion and shame convinces him that he has made himself righteous, or at least something God will accept and receive. Yet, deep down inside he knows, even in his abominable self-righteousness, that that refuge is all fig leaves and a refuge of lies. His bed is too short; he cannot rest. His covering is too narrow; he cannot cover himself. He has no ease in his soul, no comfort in his heart, no peace with God.

Still, he works to make himself better. But that is his condemnation: — He loves darkness and hates light. He loves evil and hates Christ the Light. What an awful condition to be in!

“*But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God*” (John 3:21). — Be sure you understand our Lord’s words. The heaven born soul is regenerated, given a new nature, born from Christ the incorruptible Seed, by God the Holy Spirit. That newborn soul is one with Christ the Truth. Indeed, that new man created in you is “*Christ in you, ... the new Man, created in righteousness and true holiness!*” Those born of God do truth by coming to Christ the Light. The chosen, redeemed sinner is given faith in Christ and repentance toward God. The conscience is purged. The prisoner is set free. The adopted child is made to rejoice in Christ. The forgiven soul is made to be ashamed of fig-leaf righteousness. The believing soul is confidently assured that all that God requires of him Christ is for him and he is in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:1-4).

6. In that great and terrible Day of Judgment the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man Mediator, will be either your everlasting Executioner or your everlasting Savior (v. 49). — “*For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.*”

Here is the Divine authority of the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus, as the God-man Mediator, did only that which he was commanded to do and spoke only that which he was commanded to speak as our Covenant Surety, as Jehovah’s own Fellow, and the Servant of the Lord. Christ, as a man, as our Mediator, had his mission and commission, his instructions and commandments from his Father to preach the Gospel unto men and gather his sheep into the fold of grace (John 10:16-18). He was appointed to the work from eternity. He agreed to accomplish all the work as our Surety. He was anointed for it by the Holy Ghost. He was prepared for the work in the incarnation. He finished the work at Calvary. And he was accepted into heaven as our Forerunner, and rewarded for his obedience, when he ascended on high.

7. In the light of these things, I urge you to obey God’s commandment, I urge you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, because God’s commandment is life everlasting (v. 50). — “*And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.*”

God's commandment is that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23-24; John 6:28-29; Romans 3:31; Ezekiel 33:14-16, 19). The only way any sinner can do that which is "*lawful and right*" is by offering God that which he requires, that which he only can give — Christ. The only way we can restore the pledge, give back what we took away, the only way a sinner can make restitution to God is by faith in Christ, by bringing Christ to God in the hands of faith.

God's commandment is the Gospel; and the Gospel of Christ is life. It is the ministration of life, the means by which God gives life to dead sinners (1 Peter 1:23-25), the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18). When the Gospel comes home to the chosen, redeemed sinner in the mighty power of God the Holy Spirit, it gives life.

“How will my heart endure
The terrors of that day
When earth and Heav'n before His face
Astonished shrink away?

But ere that trumpet shakes
The mansions of the dead,
Hark from the Gospel's cheering sound
What joyful tidings spread:

Ye sinners, seek His grace
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross
And find salvation there.”

—*Philipp Doddridge*

Chapter 89 Loved to Perfection

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”
(John 13:1)

The Lord Jesus was on his way to Calvary, where he must be made sin for us. There, upon the cursed tree, “*bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,*” he must suffer and die as the cursed thing, the thing specifically cursed of God. In just a few hours, the holy Lamb of God must go through Gethsemane’s darkness. There he would anticipate being made sin, being forsaken by his Father in those three hours of darkness. In Gethsemane, he will begin to drink the bitter cup. His very heart crushed within him, he will sweat great drops of blood, falling to the ground. In less than twenty-four hours, those very hands that washed the disciples’ feet would be nailed to the cross, and he who spoke so tenderly to his little band of followers would be in his death agonies, suffering all the horror of hell, all the horror of God’s infuriated wrath in the room and stead of his people.

What was on his mind? What were his thoughts? It is important to know that which is on a man’s heart when he comes to the end of his life, when he knows he is about to leave this world. Someone long ago wrote, “The ruling passion is strong in death.” The ruling passion of a person’s life is strong in death, be that passion hypocrisy or sincerity, whether it be selfish or magnanimous, “the ruling passion is strong in death.” As men are leaving this world, they usually reveal that which is the chief, ruling passion by which they have lived.

That was certainly the case with our blessed Savior. He had almost reached the end of his earthly life. He now came to a time of great trouble and agony of heart and soul. He was about to endure the great and terrible death of the cross, by which he would purchase and obtain eternal redemption for all God’s elect. What was uppermost in his mind? What filled his heart? What did he think of his disciples in that hour, when he had so many things to occupy his mind? What thoughts occupied his heart? What moved his soul? These questions are answered in the most amazing way imaginable in John 13:1.

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

The Savior’s love burned as brightly at the Passover Supper as it had ever burned before. Behold how he loved his disciples! Even at the end of his life he still loved them. — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*” I want to do the best I can to expound this marvellous revelation of God line by line and word by word. I do not want to miss, or lightly pass over anything in this text that is bursting with life.

Before the Passover

First, John connects the Savior’s love for his own with the Passover. — “*Now before the feast of passover...*” — The feast of passover was the annual celebration of redemption, the celebration of God redeeming Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The feast was instituted by God himself. The great day of the feast, the highest holy day in Israel, was the Day of Atonement, when the paschal lamb was slain and its blood sprinkled upon the mercy-seat by God’s high priest.

But God’s purpose in giving that commemorative celebration was much, much more than a mere reminder of what he had done. The whole feast was, when kept by believing men and women, a blessed celebration of faith, anticipating what he would do. It was a picture of Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us.

“Paschal Lamb, by God appointed,
All our sins were on Thee laid;
By Almighty love anointed,
Thou hast full atonement made.
All Thy people are forgiven
Through the virtue of Thy blood;
Opened is the gate of heaven,
Peace is made for us with God.

Savior, hail! Enthroned in glory,
There forever to abide;
All the heavenly hosts adore Thee
Seated at Thy Father's side;
Worship, honor, power, and blessing,
Thou art worthy to receive;
Loudest praises, without ceasing,
Meet it is for us to give.”

The Lord Jesus had his mind fixed upon the purpose for which he had come into the world. He came here to give his life a ransom for many, that we might receive the forgiveness of sin in him.

Jesus Knew

Second, we are told that the Lord Jesus knew he was about to depart out of this world. — “*Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father...*” — Oh, what a change was now coming over our dear Redeemer! Though it is here stated in the most tender terms possible, the Spirit of God here tells us that our Lord Jesus knew he was about to die. He had come to die. He knew that he must die. He knew that he was about to die. And he knew all that he must suffer in dying. Yet, such is the fulness of his love that even as he anticipated the wormwood and the gall, his heart was upon his people. — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!*” He set his face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem; but there was no flint in his heart.

The Lord Jesus undertook the work of our redemption, as our covenant Surety before he made the worlds. He must go through with it. Death itself could not change his love. Truly, his “*love is strong as death*” (Song of Solomon 8:6) and stronger than death. His love for us was stronger than that death of deaths, which he deigned to die that he might make us live. This was his great “*hour*” of trial; but he was true to “*his own*” even in this dreadful hour. He was about to die; but he still loved “*his own*.”

The blessed Savior was about to depart out of this world, to go away from his disciples. Soon, they would see him no more. Soon, they would hear his voice no more. It may be true that “*absence makes the heart grow fonder*,” but men often forget those they profess to love when they are separated from them. Many hearts are shamefully, but completely dependent upon sight. But it is not so with Christ. All the distance between earth and heaven was soon to intervene between our Lord and his disciples; yet he loved them; and he loves them still. No distance makes any difference between him and “*his own*.” — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*”

He was going unto the Father. None of us have the slightest idea what that involved. I will not attempt to describe the heavenly splendors of his throne, the glories which his redeemed delight to lay at his feet, the songs which angels continually sing in his presence. His glory, now that he has returned to his Father, is glory that no mortal heart can imagine, and no mortal mind can conceive. Yet, we may confidently sing...

“Now though he reigns exalted high,
His love is still as great;
Well He remembers Calvary,
Nor lets his saints forget.”

I cannot describe the wondrous experiences of our Lord Jesus, from life to death, from death to resurrection, from resurrection to ascension, from ascension to the glories of his Father’s throne. But all those changes made no change in him, none of them. — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”*

“Having Loved”

Third, we are given a full description of how the Lord Jesus had loved his own up to this point in time: — *“Having loved his own.”* How much can be done with one stroke of a pen! With those four words John gives us the whole history of Christ’s dealings with his disciples. — *“Having loved his own.”*

Remember, that is how he began with them; and that is how he began with us. They were poor and insignificant; but he loved them. He showed his love for them by calling them to be his own. That love wrought effectually upon their hearts, and made them obedient to his call. He began his relationship with them by loving them. The Lord Jesus loved my soul out of the pit. I do not know a better way to describe conversion and salvation than that. Do you? — Christ has loved us out of the pit! The love of God loves us up out of the pit, and loves us to Christ. Thus Christ loved his people from the beginning, with an everlasting love, and proves his love by drawing them to himself; and the cords he uses to draw them to himself are the bands of his own love for them.

Having begun by loving them, he taught them. And all his teaching was love, for they were, like you and me, very slow learners, quick to forget and slow to remember. Yet, he went on teaching them because he loved them. Had he not loved them, he would not have tolerated them. Did he not love us, he would soon cast us aside, and look for a people more worthy.

“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” — What massive love there is in that question! So it was when he was dealing with Thomas. In his tenderness he submitted without question to the doubting disciple’s test. He said to him, *“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”* All his teaching, all his doctrine dripped with mercy, love, and grace. All his lessons were lessons of love.

The Lord kept on loving his disciples, though they were sinners still and far from being perfect disciples. What weaknesses and infirmities they had, all of them! When in the tempest, they were fearful and suspected the Lord Jesus of caring nothing for them. Yet, he loved them. When he told them of his certain death and resurrection, they understood not the words that he spoke. Yet, he loved them still. When he looked into the future and saw that they all would soon be cowardly and faithless, he loved them still. He said, *“All ye shall be offended because of me this night;”* and so it came to pass, for *“they all forsook him.”* He told Peter that he would deny him thrice; and so it came to pass. Yet, *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!”*

In spite of all their weaknesses, sins, failures, rebellions, inconsistencies, and ignorance, the Lord Jesus kept on loving them! He had made up his mind to love them, and he never ceased to love them as long as he was with them; and he has gone on loving them ever since. When he was about to depart out of the world unto the Father, they still needed to have their feet washed; and he still loved them. He loved them enough to stoop before each one and wash their feet! All the infirmities, the imperfections, the carnality, the dullness, the

unbelief, and the hardness of their hearts, which he saw in them did not cause his love for them to cool or diminish in the least. — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”*

That sums it all up. There was never the slightest touch of hate, the slightest hint of anger, the least sign of weariness, or the slightest lukewarmness in the Savior’s love. It was always just the same. — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”*

That is the love of Christ to his chosen; and that is the love of Christ to me! I never knew, I never heard of such a lover as he is. I never dreamed that he could be such a lover as he has been and is to me. Oh, how I have vexed and grieved his gracious heart! But never, never, never once have I found anything from him but love! — *“Having loved his own.”* That expression sums up the whole of Christ’s conduct towards his chosen people. It reveals every feature of his character. There it is, all of it. You may use a microscope, and look as long as you like, but you will find that it is all there. — *“Having loved his own.”*

“His Own”

Fourth, John identifies the objects of the Savior’s love as *“his own.”* That is a very brief description; but it is magnificent and full. — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”* — *“His own”* — Do you know how they came to be *“his own”*?

He chose them as his own before the worlds were made. As long as the Scripture stands, the doctrine of election can never be eradicated from it. Before the day-star knew its place, or planets ran their rounds, Christ had made his choice, and, having made it, he stood to it. He chose them for his love; and he loved them for his choice.

Having loved them and having chosen them, he espoused them unto himself. — *“They shall be mine,”* said he; *“I will be married to them, I will be bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh.”* Therefore, in the fulness of time, he came here, made one with our humanity, that he might be seen to be a true Husband to *“his own.”* — *“His own,”* by his own choice, espoused to him from everlasting!

They were *“his own”* by divine gift, too. His Father gave them to him. The Father committed them into his hands. *“Thine they were,”* said the Savior, *“and thou gavest them me.”* The Father loved the Son and committed all things into his hands; but he made a special committal of his own chosen people. He gave them to him, and entered with him into suretyship engagements on their behalf, that as they were his sheep, committed to his charge, he would deliver them up into the heavenly fold; and not one of them would be torn by the wolf, or die of the frost or the heat, but that all would pass again under the rod of him who counts the sheep. He has sworn, *“I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant”* (Ezekiel 20:37).

The great Shepherd of the sheep will take care of the whole flock that was entrusted to his care. He will not lose one of his sheep. In the last day he will say, *“Father, here I am, and the children that you gave me; of all that you gave me I have lost none.”* Thus, they are *“his own”* by his own choice, *“his own”* by espousal, and *“his own”* by his Father’s gift.

And all those the Lord Jesus calls *“his own”* are his by a wondrous purchase, by the purchase of his own life’s blood. He looked upon their redemption as being already accomplished, for in his prayer he said to his Father, *“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”* Truly, the work was finished from the foundation of the world; and in just another twenty-four hours, our blessed Lord Jesus would cry, *“It is finished!”* Think often my brother, think often my sister, how dearly bought you are. Think often of the fact that you belong to Christ, that you are numbered among *“his own”* by the price of his own blood. — *“Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.”* Oh, what a price he paid!

He loved us better than he loved himself. He paid the purchase price for us that was demanded by the law and justice of the Triune Jehovah, the price required that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Well may he call us "*his own*" when it cost him so much to redeem us.

And we have become "*his own*" by his conquest of his love. He called his disciples by his grace. He drew each one of them by cords of love. And they ran after him. That is just the way it is with you and me, with all who are his. You remember when he drew you; do you not? Can you ever forget when, at last, you yielded to the power of those bands of love, those cords of a man? How gladly we now sing, —

“Oh, happy day, that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Savior, and my God;
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad!

‘Tis done! the great transaction’s done;
I am my Lord’s, and He is mine:
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.”

We are "*his own*" because of the force of his irresistible love. His love has conquered our hearts. "*We love him because he first loved us!*" There is no greater joy to our souls than the knowledge that we belong to Christ, that we are "*his own*." The fact that we truly are Christ's is the fountain of innumerable pleasures and blessings. The Son of God calls us "*his own*," — his own sheep, — his own disciples, — his own friends, — his own brethren, — the members of his own body. What a title for such things as we are to wear, — "*his own!*" We are HIS OWN! He owns us. He calls us "*his own*." With those two magnificent words, he distinguishes us from the rest of mankind, and sets us apart unto himself. "*My name shall be named on them,*" he says. — "*His own*." — Surely, that is the highest honor that can be put upon us even in the last great day. "*They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.*"

Oh, the wondrous sovereignty of divine love! Oh, the wondrous mystery of it! Oh, the wondrous majesty of it! Loved and chosen! Loved and redeemed! Loved and called! Loved and kept! — "*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*"

“Which were in the World”

Fifth, the Spirit of God reminds us where "*his own*" are who are loved by the Lord Jesus. — "*Having loved his own which were in the world.*" There is something wondrous about this declaration, — "*which were in the world.*" As a pastor, maintained in my livelihood by the generosity of God's saints, I live a very secluded life. I am very seldom confronted with the people among whom you live every day. You live in the midst of heathendom. The sooner we believe that terrible truth the better, because it is really so; and the Church of God in the world is nothing but a travelling tent in the midst of a world that lives in the wicked one. We are "*in the world.*" Like Lot was in Sodom, you are in the world, vexed day by day in your righteous soul with all that is paraded before you every hour, in every place. To be "*in the world*" is to be in the midst of unrestrained idolatry, abounding wickedness, and relentless blasphemy.

Being in the world, these disciples soon began to be persecuted. They were stoned, imprisoned, and dragged into the amphitheater to be torn of lions. Yet, "*having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*" — "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors*

through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in-Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the world we are tempted. In the world we are afflicted. In the world we suffer. In the world we are in pain. In the world we sin. In the world we get sick. In the world we are bereaved. In the world we die. We have losses and crosses because we are "*in the world.*" God's curse still rests upon the earth: "*Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.*" — Nothing else! You may do what you like with it; but you cannot make it stop bringing forth thorns and thistles. They will continue to spring up as surely as the dust will return to the dust from whence it came. Yet, we read that the Lord Jesus, "*having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*" All the things we experience in the world come upon us and are brought to pass by him who loved us from everlasting, loved us at Calvary, and loves us now.

"To the End"

Here is the *sixth* thing revealed in our text. — Our Savior loves his own who are in the world unto the end. — "*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*" He who loved us from everlasting will love us always. — "*He loved them unto the end.*" What does that sentence mean? Without question, it must be asserted that the Lord Jesus loved his own unto the end of his obedience, unto the end of the law's demands, unto the end of the curse, unto the end of their transgressions, and unto the end of God's wrath.

But the text specifically means that his love is constant, immutable, and unending. The Hebrew phrase, "*His mercy endureth forever,*" might be rendered, "*His mercy endureth to the end.*" His mercy endures to the end which has no end, for there never will be an end to his mercy; and his love is continual, everlasting love; it will never come to an end. Having loved them while he was in the world with them, he loves them right straight on, and always will love them when time shall be no more.

The words of our text might be translated, "*having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the uttermost.*" He loves his people to the utmost stretch of love. He loves us to the utmost length of our need. He loves us without measure.

The sentence might also be rendered, "*He loved them to perfection.*" — "*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto perfection.*" The Lord Jesus loves us perfectly. The knowledge of his perfect love casts out all fear. And the sure and certain result of his love is the everlasting, glorious perfection of all "*his own.*" Yes, he loves us unto perfection (Ephesians 5:25-27; Jude 1:24-25). — "*Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*" (Jude 1:21).

Chapter 90
Dark Providences Cleared in Due Time

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

(John 13:1-20)

How many times have you seen or known some terribly painful, traumatic, almost devastating thing, and thought to yourself, “What good can come of this? How is this going to work for good? How will this benefit anyone? Can this be honoring to God?”

We know that our heavenly Father is too wise to err, too strong to fail, and too good to do wrong. Yet, when tragedies come close to home, we cannot help asking, “Why did this thing happen?” We may not openly say it, but we ask in frustration, perhaps in anger or resentment, — “God, what are you doing?”

Here in John 13 God the Holy Spirit has preserved by divine inspiration a word from our dear Savior that should help to prepare for such times. As the Lord Jesus began to wash his disciples’ feet, Peter was confused by the Master’s conduct, and said to him in verse 6, — “*Lord, Dost thou wash my feet?*” Then, in verse 7, “*Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*”

When Jacob awoke from his dream, he said, “*Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not*” (Genesis 28:16). When Samson’s strength was gone, we are told, “*He wist not that the Lord was departed from him*” (Judges 16:20). What is said of our Savior’s presence and absence, his goings and comings, may also be said of his doings. — “*What I do,*” he says, “*thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*”

Specifically this word from our Savior in John 13:7, “*What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter,*” refers to our Lord’s act of washing his disciples’ feet. But it is a statement that is clearly applicable to God’s providence. The design or intention of God’s works of providence are often, if not usually, hidden from his people; but they shall be revealed in due time.

“God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break,
In blessing on your head.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own Interpreter;
And He will make it plain.”

— *William Cowper*

Immutable Love

First, we see that the love of Christ for us is immutable and incessant. — “*Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*” (v. 1). The love of Christ for his elect is a love surpassing thought. There is nothing like it in this world below. The narrow, self-centered thoughts, and words, and deeds of humanity cannot comprehend it. Our Savior knew that his disciples would all soon forsake him. Yet, he loved them to the end. His love for us is from everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3). His love for us is from everlasting (Romans 8:39). In matchless, free love the Lord Jesus Christ delights to receive sinners (Luke 15:2). So great, so free, so immutable is the love of Christ for our souls that having embraced us in his arms from everlasting, he will never reject us or cast us away for any reason (John 6:37).

God’s Absolute Dominion

Second, learn this: God’s dominion over all things is absolute. Even the most base, vile, and despicable acts of reprobate men and women are under the absolute rule of our God and heavenly Father (vv. 2-3). Even the work of Satan himself is under the rule and control of our God and Savior (Psalm 76:10; Proverbs 16:4). Yes, our heavenly Father wisely and sovereignly uses his enemies and ours, contrary to their will, to do that which will advance his cause, as when the Philistines were constrained to send the ark of God back to Israel (1 Samuel 5:1-7:17). Ralph Erskine rightly observed...

“He employs the wicked themselves to carry on his work, and make their wicked designs to contribute to advancement of his holy and glorious design; as he did make the treason of Judas, the sentence of Pilate, the malice of the Jews, to contribute for the work of redemption.”

Judas' Brazen Hypocrisy

Third, nothing in all the world is more corrupt or more callous than the heart of a hypocrite. There sat Judas at the table with the Son of God and his disciples. But he had already struck his deal with the Jew's priests to betray the Savior (v. 2). What brazen hypocrisy!

Judas stands as a beacon to warn us of what deep corruption may be found in the hearts of very religious people. He shows us how far a man may go in religion and yet be rotten at heart. He shows us how much a person may know about the things of God and yet not know God. He shows us how high one may rise in the eyes of men and in religious office and yet be unconverted. Judas shows us how confident a person may be that he is saved, even when he is on the brink of hell!

We must not be surprised, overwhelmed, or overly disturbed when we find such hypocrites among God's saints. Not all who are washed in the waters of baptism have been washed in the blood of Christ (v. 10). — "*They are not all Israel which are of Israel*" (Romans 9:6).

"Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." (John 13:10)

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2 Peter 1:10)

Blood Washed

Fourth, we are reminded again that we must be washed in the blood of Christ. The only way we can be saved is by being washed in the blood of Christ. The only saved sinner is the blood washed sinner (vv. 8-10).

"Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all."

What can wash away my sins?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow!
No other fount I know —
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (Zechariah 13:1)

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe

in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.” (1 Peter 1:18-21)

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:7-9)

We cannot be saved unless Christ has washed us in his blood (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We must be washed in the blood judicially. That took place for all God’s elect when the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption and obtained eternal redemption for us at Calvary (Hebrews 1:3). And we must be washed in the Savior’s blood experimentally. That takes place in regeneration and effectual calling, when God the Holy Spirit applies the cleansing blood to our hearts, giving us faith in Christ, purging our consciences of guilt before God, bringing life and immortality to light by the Gospel (Titus 3:5; Hebrews 9:14). Even those who are cleansed and forgiven need a daily application to the blood of Christ for daily pardon. — “*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7, 9).

Humility Exemplified

Fifth, in this passage of Scripture the Lord Jesus gives us a blessed example of genuine humility and love (vv. 5-17).

“After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

True humility and love willingly condescends to do whatever is needed to meet the needs of those who are the objects of our love. Though it is apparent that our Savior washed Judas’ feet, too, the message is in what he did for his disciples. The Son of God stooped to wash his disciples’ feet, and he still does! When he shows us the foulness of our feet (our sin), and then graciously causes us to dip our feet in the fountain of his blood (Zechariah 13:1), and when he enables us with tears of repentance to wash and kiss his feet (Luke 7:38; Ezekiel 16:63), our dear Savior still washes his disciples’ feet (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away!

This self-denying, loving service is our responsibility to one another in this world (vv. 14-15). In all things, Christ’s example is our rule of life (1 John 3:16-17). And all who follow our Lord’s example find happiness and satisfaction in doing so. — “*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*” (v. 17). Nothing

brings greater joy to devoted saints than the privilege and grace of obedience to Christ and usefulness to his people.

Providence Cleared

Sixth, all the dark mysteries and painful experiences of God's providence will be cleared up for God's saints in God's time. — “*Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter*” (v. 7).

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace.
Behind the frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face!

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own Interpreter;
And He will make it plain!

Jacob lamented, “*All these things are against me!*” But before the Lord took him out of this world, the old saint learned better and said, “*God fed me all my life long. The Angel of the LORD redeemed me from all evil.*” Joseph must have been horribly confused by all his woes. But before he left this world he understood that he was in the place of God. When Moses first came to deliver Israel out of Egypt, the Egyptians only increased their torment. But in the end Israel sang God's praise for all his goodness, triumphing over Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and thoroughly spoiling the Egyptians. Haman erected gallows for Mordecai; but it was Haman who was hanged upon them, and Mordecai was exalted. How confusing it must have been for Paul to be imprisoned at Philippi; but how he must have rejoiced when he baptized his jailor! The shipwreck that landed them upon the island of Melita, the bitter cold, and the bite of the asp all must have appeared to be acts of divine disfavor; but they were all acts of great mercy, opening the way for the salvation of a barbarian chieftain and many others. Truly, “*thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary; thy way is in the seas, thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known*” (Psalm 77:13, 19). — “*Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep*” (Psalm 36:6). — “*The works of the Lord are great; sought out of all them that have pleasure therein*” (Psalm 111: 2).

Sometimes God's providence appears to contradict His promises (Exodus 5:21-23). Sometimes God's acts of mercy and grace in providence look and feel like acts of wrath and judgment. Sometimes God appears to be favorable to the wicked and indifferent, at best, to the righteous (Psalm 73). Many, many things in this world are confusing to God's people. When God gave Abraham a son, he required Abraham to sacrifice his son. When Moses brought Israel up to Canaan, God refused to let him take Israel in to possess the land. When time came to build the temple, David died. God often lifts up with one hand and casts down with the other; heals with one and wounds with the other. Blessed Holy Spirit, let us at all times understand and rest our souls upon this promise of God our Savior to our souls. — “*What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*”

When we think the Lord is doing nothing, he is working for us. When we think he has forsaken us, he is with us still. When we think everything is against us, everything is loaded down with mercy for us. Our Lord will not let us walk by sight here. He demands and deserves that we walk by faith. “*What I do now thou knowest not; but thou shalt know hereafter.*” In due time, he will inform us.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him

again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36)

Often I wonder why I must journey
Over a road so rugged and steep.
Why all the darkness? Why all the heartache?
Why must Your chosen so often weep?
Farther along we'll know more about it.
Farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, believer, trust your great Savior. —
We'll understand it all by and by.

Amen.

Chapter 91

Foot Washing

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

(John 13:1-20)

The things recorded in John 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are things that God the Holy Spirit inspired John alone to record. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke mention the things recorded in these five chapters. We can never be sufficiently thankful that God the Holy Spirit caused them to be written here for our learning and admonition and for our edification and consolation. The things here revealed have been meat and drink for thirsty souls for more than two thousand years. They provide strength and comfort for Zion’s pilgrims in every age and land, as they are blessed to the hearts of God’s elect by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit.

What was the intent of our Lord Jesus in performing this very menial task of washing his disciples’ feet? What does he teach us in this passage?

Blessed Departure

First, we learn that as our Savior looked upon his rapidly-approaching death as a blessed departure out of this world unto the Father, so we who believe should anticipate the death of the body. — “*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father*” (v. 1). Our blessed Savior expressed a great ambition to eat this last Passover feast with his disciples, that he might fulfil its typical significance by dying in our place, as our Passover Sacrifice, to make atonement for the sins of his elect. Our Lord Jesus was anxious to die as our Substitute and accomplish our redemption by the sacrifice of himself.

Though he must die the shameful, painful, ignominious death of the cross, though he must be made sin for us, though he must die as a man cursed of God, when he was made sin for us, our Savior knew that his departure out of this world would be the end of sin and the end of suffering, the end of shame and the end of the curse, the end of wrath and the end of sorrow, both for him and for us, “*for he that hath suffered in the flesh*

hath ceased from sin!" Therefore, his death as our Substitute would be his accomplished exodus (Luke 9:31) out of this world unto the Father.

Because he died for us, "*the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God,*" he has delivered us from the fear of death. That is to say, death for God's saints is but removing from one place to another. It is the quiet, sweet, longed for departure out of this world unto the Father. As John Trapp put it, "It is to the saints no more than a passage to the Father, an inlet to eternal life." One aged believer long ago said, as he was dying, "The Father loves me, the Son redeemed me, the Holy Ghost comforts me; how then can I be cast down at the approach of death?"

As a specific time and hour was fixed for our Savior's entrance into this world from eternity, so the time and hour of our entrance into this world was fixed from eternity. As the specific time and hour of our Redeemer's departure out of this world was fixed from eternity, so the time and hour of our departure out of this world was fixed from eternity. Bless God, we shall soon depart out of this world! And when we depart out of this world, we will be departing unto my Father, to dwell forever in his house.

Incomparable Love

Second, the Holy Spirit here speaks of our Savior's great love for his people as an incomparable love of indestructible and patient perseverance. — "*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*" (v. 1).

The objects of his love are described as "*his own.*" Those words do not refer to all men, though all are his property by creation. The words "*his own*" do not refer to the Jews, who were his own nation and countrymen according to the flesh. And they do not merely refer to the twelve apostles, whom he had chosen. These two, sweet, sweet words — "*His Own,*" — refer to all the hosts of God's elect, those who are his own by his own choice of them, the Father's gift of them to him, the purchase he made of them with his blood, and his effectual call of them by his grace.

Our Savior's love is specifically said to be a love for "*his own which were in the world.*" — That means that our Savior loves us in our present state and condition, whatever that state and condition may be. He loves his own in this present, evil world. Though we live in this body of sin and death, though we are liable to many snares and temptations, though we are weak and frail, faltering and failing, sinful and shameful, still, we are and always will be the objects of the love and care of Christ Jesus our Lord.

The acts of his love toward us are expressed both in time past and in time to come. "*Having loved*" us, he loved us from everlasting, with a love of complacency and delight, which he showed by espousing us to himself from eternity, undertaking our cause as our Surety in the covenant of grace, taking upon himself all responsibility for us as our Substitute, Representative, and Mediator, from everlasting, and by assuming our nature in the incarnation; and, having done all this, "*he loved them to the end.*"

Yes, the Lord of Glory died for us, because he loved us; and he continues to show that incomparable love for us by interceding for us in heaven, by supplying us with all grace, and by preserving us unto Glory. And he will at last bring us into his kingdom and glory. There we shall be forever with him. Imagine that! And try to get hold of this: — That same love for our souls continues not only to the end of our lives in this world, but to the end of the world, and forever! The Lord Jesus loves us; no, he *loved* us continually from everlasting and to everlasting!

Eternal Dominion

Third, we are here taught that our Savior's dominion as our Mediator is an eternal dominion. As he is "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*," in whom all God's elect were blessed and accepted from everlasting, so the Triune Jehovah trusted him from everlasting as the Mediator-Savior of his elect; and all things were given into his hands as Lord from everlasting. Notice that the language here speaks of that which was already done. We cannot even think like this really; but all the works of God were finished before the world began (Hebrews 4:3).

Christ was our accepted Sacrifice from eternity (Revelation 13:8). We were accepted in him from eternity (Ephesians 1:6). We were blessed with all the blessings of grace in Christ from eternity (Ephesians 1:3-6). The Book of God says we were saved in Christ from eternity (2 Timothy 1:9). And Christ was made Lord over all things as our Mediator from eternity, made Lord over all flesh to give eternal life to all the objects of his love from eternity. And all the works of God, "*finished from the foundation of the world*," are brought to light, made manifest, and openly performed in due time, to the praise of his glory.

But the primary purpose of verse 3 is to show us that our Savior understood and was fully aware of his own great, indescribable dignity and superiority as a man. — "*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God*." By telling us this, and then telling us about our Lord washing his disciples' feet, the Holy Spirit is emphasizing the Lord's act as a matter of great, indescribable condescension.

In the very moment when he knew himself, as God-Man Mediator, to be the Lord, Proprietor, and Governor of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus did that which none but the lowest of servants among the sons of men (slaves) perform. It is obviously the Holy Spirit's intention that we have before us a sense of Christ's unbounded condescension as we consider the things that follow.

Then, the Holy Spirit inspired John to tell us that our Savior also knew that he "*was come from God, and went to God*" (v. 3). — He came from the Triune God upon a mission as Jehovah's Servant, to save his people from their sins. And the Savior knew that his work would soon be done. When he had finished all that he was sent to accomplish, he would return to the Triune God as our God-man Mediator. With these thoughts before him, our dear Savior stooped to wash his disciples' feet. Only now, only under these conditions could he give such a vivid picture of his undying love for those very people for whom he was about to die. He was now about to return to his Father. For a while, they would see him no more (John 16:10).

Indescribable Humiliation

Fourth, our Savior's act of washing his disciples' feet was intended to set before them and us a picture of his indescribable humiliation as our sin-atonement Substitute. I have no doubt that we have before us in this chapter a very clear and vivid picture of the self-abasing, condescending service we ought to gladly render to one another. What the Lord Jesus did for us, we should gladly do for one another. Does he serve us? Let us serve one another. Does he refresh us? Let us refresh one another. Does he stoop to meet our needs? Let us stoop to meet one another's needs. Did he empty himself to fill us? Let us empty ourselves to fill one another. Did he abase himself to meet our needs and lift us up? Let us abase ourselves to meet the needs of others and lift others. Does he love us? Let us love one another. Did he lay down his life for us? Let us lay down our lives for one another.

The foot washing described in this chapter portrays the loving services we ought to render to the church and kingdom of our God and the humility of mind with which we should gladly serve one another in this world (Philippians 2:1-11). And the Master's washing of the disciples' feet may well be intended to be a declaration of the high esteem with which God's servants should be esteemed by his people. Our Lord's statement in verse 20 certainly implies that he intended that we understand it this way. — "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*"

The washing of his disciples' feet and not their hands was, perhaps, a ceremonial presentation of them as his Apostles, as preachers of the Gospel (Isaiah 52:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

But the primary thing intended by this marvellous act of humiliation was to give us a picture of the great, indescribable condescension and humiliation of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he stooped to redeem us.

“He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe [them] with the towel wherewith he was girded.” (John 13:4-5)

This is a great and beautiful picture of the Son of God laying aside his glory, which he had with the Father before all worlds, and taking upon him the form of a servant, when he came to wash his people from their sins in his blood (Philippians 2:5-8; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 5:21).

This is truly the one thing needful, the one thing that is absolutely necessary for our souls. — We must be washed in the Savior's precious blood. The Lord Jesus said, emphatically, to Peter, — “*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*” Though our Savior baptized no one, and made a point of stressing that fact (John 4:2), as if to tell us that baptism has no saving merit or efficacy of any kind, he says to you and me, as he did to Peter, — “*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*” — “*Without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Hebrews 9:22). We must be washed judicially (Romans 3:24-26). We must be washed experimentally (Titus 3:4-7; Zechariah 3:1-9). And we must be washed continually (1 John 1:7, 9).

Inward, not Outward

Fifth, the fact that the Lord Jesus washed Judas' feet is very instructive. Are you not astonished by the fact that Judas' feet were washed by the Son of God, in common with the other Apostles? It is almost shocking. Isn't it? It shouldn't be. Our Lord Jesus did this deliberately; and his deliberate act of washing Judas' feet was obviously intended to teach us much.

True, saving grace is inward, not outward. Judas was washed ceremonially, outwardly, but not spiritually, not inwardly, not experimentally. There is no saving benefit, merit, or efficacy in any outward ordinance, even if the ordinance were administered by Christ himself. God's people, true believers, are never injured or kept from spiritual benefit by the presence of devils in our assemblies of worship. Judas' defilement did not corrupt Peter, James, or John. Robert Hawker rightly observed...

“As the presence of Judas had no effect to injure the Apostles in those hallowed seasons with their Lord, so neither can devils, or bad men, hinder the blessed manifestations which the Lord makes to his own, when handing to them their portions in secret, and causing them to eat of the ‘*hidden manna*’ (Revelation 2:17).”

When devils like Judas raise their ugly heads and manifest themselves in our midst, we should be reminded of God's distinguishing grace. The only difference between Judas and the others was God's free, sovereign, electing, distinguishing grace; and the same is true today (vv. 18-19; 1 Corinthians 4:7).

Application

O what a picture of grace we have before us! What an endearing portrait God the Holy Ghost has given us by the pen of his servant John of our Lord Jesus Christ! Can the imagination conceive anything equally lovely as in thus beholding the Son of God in our nature, washing the feet of poor fishermen? The picture was drawn at that

moment, above all others, when the Lord Jesus “*knew that the Father had given all things into his hands!*” Ponder it well. What a lesson is here taught to mortify the pride of our hearts!

While the great ones of the earth carry themselves so proudly, and will hardly condescend to look upon the poor, the destitute, the homeless, and the wicked, the King of heaven stoops to the lowest humiliation and washes his disciples’ feet. Let us never lose sight of this unequalled condescension of our Lord. Shall you, or I, or shall any poor sinner, in the view of such clemency, ever imagine that it is beneath the dignity of the Son of God to regard his people in our low estate. Did the Lord Jesus wash their feet, and will he not wash my soul? Did the Son of God, unasked, yea, even when Peter refused him, persist to perform such an act of grace; and will he turn a blind eye to our needs or a deaf ear to our earnest petitions? Can any child of God, in the contemplation of such love in our Savior and Lord, say, I am too low, too abject, too unworthy for his care?

By this act of washing his disciples’ feet before his departure, our blessed Savior intended to convince us that his love is the same now as it was when he walked here in our flesh, as when he lived for us, and as when he died in our stead at Calvary. His very last act on earth, before suffering for them, was to wash his disciples’ feet. And with that act he declared his complete devotion to them. Neither time, nor place, nor circumstances can alter his love for our souls.

May God the Holy Spirit cause us to keep these things always in remembrance. It will not be long until he who washed his disciples’ feet will bring us home to glory, washed from all our sins in his blood, and present us to himself, sanctified and cleansed, “*a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but...holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Soon, the Son of God, our Savior, will “*present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24).

Chapter 92

Christ our Example

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:1)

What is the believer’s rule of life? By what standard must our lives be governed, as the children of God in this world? How should we behave? What principles are we to live by, as we walk before God and men in this world? By what law are we to live?

These are questions which concern all of God’s children. None of God’s people are lawless, rebellious antinomians. All who trust Christ want to honor God. All who are born of God want to do the will of God. We want to do what is right before God and men. The grace of God experienced in the soul teaches us to live *“soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world”* (Titus 2:12). As we are admonished in Holy Scripture, saved sinners want to *“be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15).

A man or woman who is chosen, redeemed, and regenerated by the grace of God has a principle of godliness and righteousness created in his or her heart. Such a person wants to live in a manner that will be pleasing and honoring to God, for the glory of Christ. If you do not love God’s law, you neither know God nor love God. Your religion is a refuge of lies. Your pretense of faith is a delusion.

Antinomian Slander

Because we preach the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ, declaring incessantly and everywhere that salvation is free, that grace is unconditional, and that God’s elect are free from the law, that God will never charge his own with sin, as the Scriptures everywhere assert, we are slandered by religious legalists as antinomians, as promoters of licentiousness. These work-mongers, who had already crept into the church in Jude’s day, have multiplied through the ages. Pretending to preach the grace of God, they attempt to mix law and grace together and blasphemously assert that the preaching of free grace leads to licentiousness (Jude 1:4).

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The Gospel of God is the Gospel of godliness. It teaches all who know it to *“lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”* (1 Timothy 2:2). It is *“wholesome doctrine which is according to godliness”* (1 Timothy 6:3).

Three Statements

Here are three things we need to learn, as we seek to live in this world for the glory of God our Savior.

1. Believers are not under the law, period.

There is absolutely no sense in which believers are under the yoke of bondage. We are not under the ceremonial laws of Israel. We are not under the civil laws given to Israel. We are not under the dietary laws given to Israel. We are not under the economic laws given to Israel. And we are not under the moral law, the Ten Commandments, that was given to Israel.

The law was given to Israel alone. No one else was commanded, or even allowed to observe the Jews sabbath days, ceremonies, and ordinances. The law was given to point to Christ. The law was a schoolmaster unto Christ. The law is not our rule of life! We have no commitment to the law, no curse from the law, and not constraint by the law (Romans 6:14-15).

The law promises reward for obedience and threatens punishment for disobedience; but God’s saints are not mercenaries. We do not serve our God for gain, or because of fear. God’s elect are not motivated by such things. Our service to God is motivated by love, grace, and faith. God requires and accepts heart obedience. He will not accept the mere outward, pretentious show of the hypocrite. — The Almighty sees through the Pharisee’s show!

Did you hear the Scriptures? — *“We are not under the law, but under grace!”* The law makes men slaves. It produces bondage and bondage creates strife. Law work promotes pride, self-righteousness, and judgmental attitudes. We are expressly and repeatedly warned not to be brought in bondage to the law (Romans

7:1-4; Galatians 3:24-26; Romans 10:1-4; Galatians 5:1-4; Colossians 2:14-16). The reason the law was given at Sinai was to point sinners to Calvary. The law was given to point us to Christ, who alone obeyed its requirements and satisfied its justice as the sinner's Substitute.

2. **God's people in this world must not allow themselves to be ruled by the self-righteous standards, traditions, laws, and customs imposed by religious men** (1 Timothy 4:1-5; Romans 14:5, 11-17).

It is customary in our day for men to set themselves up as judges of other men's spirituality, dedication, and devotion. They call it "fruit inspecting." But the standard by which they judge is a very faulty one. It changes from one place to another, from one time to another, and from one circumstance to another. But you can be sure of this: — Anything that is right is always right; and anything that is wrong is always wrong. True godliness is not outward, but inward. It is a matter of the heart. The fruit of the Spirit is heart fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

3. **Yet, we are not left without law.**

We have a law by which to live (1 John 3:23; 2 Corinthians 5:14-16). The whole of God's holy law teaches two things: Faith and Love, faith in Christ and brotherly love. By these two rules we live. The just live by faith, faith which worketh by love.

We have an example of that law of love in John 13:15. I realize that such frail creatures of the dust as we are need some example by which to live, some pattern to copy. Our sinful flesh requires that we be ruled by some law. We do not suggest that every man do that which is right in his own eyes. But what example are we to follow? What law must we submit to and obey? What is the rule by which we must live? The answer is found right here.

"Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe [them] with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also [my] hands and [my] head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash [his] feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for [so] I am. If I then, [your] Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:3-15)

The Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior, "*suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps*" (1 Peter 2:21). If I want to know how to live in this world, I need only to read the four gospels, look to Christ my Example, and follow him.

- What kind of father should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of mother should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of child should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of friend should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of husband should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of wife should I be? — Look to Christ.
- What kind of neighbor should I be? — Look to Christ.

- How should I treat my enemies? — Look to Christ.
- How should I pray? — Look to Christ.
- How should I forgive men? — Look to Christ.
- How should I deal with men in business? — Look to Christ.
- Should I pay my taxes? — Look to Christ.
- How can I know the will of God? — Look to Christ.
- How can I overcome temptation? — Look to Christ.
- How should I treat the poor? — Look to Christ.
- What is humility? — Look to Christ.
- What is sin? — Look to Christ.
- How should a believer suffer? — Look to Christ.
- What is faithfulness? — Look to Christ.
- How much should I give? — Look to Christ.
- What is patience? — Look to Christ.
- How much of this world's good should I seek? — Look to Christ.
- What is it to live by faith? — Look to Christ.
- What is love? — Look to Christ.

If you have any other questions pertaining to life in this world, look to Christ. And if you would learn how to die, when your life is over, look to Christ. In all things, Christ is our Law, our Teacher, our Guide, our Example. All who want to live in this world for the glory of God need only to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Constant Love Portrayed

John 13 records one of the most teaching and most instructive incidents in the earthly life and ministry of our Lord. Here we see the Son of God washing his disciples' feet. This picture of our Lord Jesus Christ washing his disciples' feet is a picture of our Savior's constant love toward us. Really verse one is a text for the sermon which our Lord acted out in verses 2-17. Here we see our Lord acting as a gracious Host to his disciples. He gives them bread to eat and wine to drink. He even takes a towel and a bowl of water and stoops down to wash their feet!

This was a custom in the old Eastern countries. If a man had honored guests in his home, he provided them with food, wine, and cool water to wash their feet. Abraham had some water brought for the angels who visited him to wash their feet. Joseph had his servant to wash the feet of his brothers when they came to Egypt. But Christ himself so highly honored his disciples that he washed their feet.

It is still true today that our Lord tenderly cares for our every need as our constant, gracious, loving host (Romans 8:28; Psalms 57:2).

This act of love performed by our Savior shows me three things. — *First*, the Lord Jesus Christ looks after our smallest cares and concerns with great interest. So tender is his love that he even washes his disciples' feet. He takes notice even of a little soil on their heels.

He who sovereignly rules all things
Takes care of our smallest affairs:
The almighty Lord, King of kings,
Would have us cast on Him our cares.

Second, our Lord Jesus tenderly provides refreshment for the children of his love. — In hot climates, nothing is more refreshing, after a long walk or a long day of work, than to have your feet bathed in cool water. Truly, there are many pools of cool water from which the Son of God refreshes our weary souls (His Salvation, His Promises, His Presence, His Faithfulness, His Word, His Ordinances, His Gospel, His Throne of Grace). And there are special, specific seasons when he refreshes us. Before we enter the hard labor of trial, he graciously prepares his own for the trials they must endure, with sweet refreshments of grace. In the midst of

our journey, our Savior comes to us, as he did to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, opens to us the Scriptures, and causes our hearts to burn within us, as he talks to us by the way. When we arrive home in heaven, he will refresh our souls as never before (Luke 12:37; Revelation 8:1).

Third, our blessed Lord Jesus carefully tends to the spiritual welfare of each of his disciples. He washes our feet. He washes us from the defilements of the world and the soil of worldly care.

It seems to me that the public ordinances of the gospel are especially designed for this purpose. In baptism and in the Lord's Supper we are reminded again of our Savior's great sacrifice of himself for us, and have our feet washed again. The blood is freshly applied by the Holy Spirit; and we are freshly washed in the preaching of the Gospel, in the songs of Zion, in the reading of the Word, and in the prayers and praises of God's elect.

We need to be washed daily, constantly. — "*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*" (Psalm 51:7). And our dear Savior is always ready to wash us.

An Example to Follow

Second, this picture of Christ washing his disciples' feet is an example of love for us to follow (vv. 12-15).

"So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

We do not physically observe foot washing as an ordinance, because our Lord did not instruct us to do so. The New Testament gives no hint that our Savior's disciples ever practiced such an ordinance, the early church did not do so, and we have no instruction about such an ordinance in the New Testament.

Our Lord Jesus did not institute foot washing as an ordinance for the church. He gave us an example to live by as a rule of life. He gave us a pattern to follow. He said, "*Do as I have done to you.*" Our Lord Jesus here shows us how we ought to serve one another, and how we ought to allow ourselves to be served by our brethren. Some of us are too proud to wash someone else's feet; and some of us are too proud to have our feet washed by someone else.

Three lessons are clearly taught by our Savior's example in this portion of Holy Scripture: *First*, we should carefully maintain love for one another (John 13:35; 1 John 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). *Second*, love is serviceable. Love does not say. Love does! No service is too great for love. No service is too small for love. No service is too demanding for love. No service is too costly for love. *Third*, love is the never ending, abiding law of Christ's church (John 13:34-35).

Our dear Savior himself shows us how to love (1 John 3:16-17; 4:9-11). Deeds of love and kindness are understood by all men. And love is all the law fulfilled and all the law needed. — "*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Galatians 5:14).

"If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:1-8)

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." (John 13:17)

Chapter 93
Judas and the Glory of God

“I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some *of them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy *those things* that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night. Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” (John 13:18-31)

John 13 begins with a declaration of God the Holy Spirit, by which he describes the everlasting love of the Lord Jesus Christ for his elect. — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*” Our Savior’s love for his people is here described as a sovereign, eternal love — “*Having loved,*” a special, distinguishing love — “*Having loved his own,*” and a steadfast, unchanging, immutable love — “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!*”

Do you remember what our Savior said, in Psalm 109, about this great love of his, which charms our hearts and ravishes our souls? — “*They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I [give myself unto] prayer*” (Psalms 109:3-4). The Lord Jesus here declares that the reason for man’s opposition to him and his people is his love for his people. Yes, he declares that men and women everywhere hate God because God loves his people. That is the reason Cain hated his brother Abel and murdered him. Ishmael persecuted Isaac because God loved Isaac. That is why Esau despised Jacob. God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Men and women everywhere hate God because God loves his people. Nothing enrages the heart of man like the fact of God’s free, sovereign, saving love bestowed upon chosen sinners in Christ (Romans 9:4-23).

There are among the fallen sons of Adam only two groups of people: the elect and the reprobate, the seed of Christ and the seed of the serpent, vessels of mercy afore prepared to glory by whom and in whom God makes known the riches of his glory, and vessels of wrath fitted to destruction by whom and in whom God makes his power known. The greatest, most glaring example of those vessels of wrath fitted to destruction is the betrayer of our Lord Jesus, Judas Iscariot.

Election and Predestination

The portion of Holy Scripture before us begins with our Lord Jesus assuring his disciples of their election and the certainty of God’s purpose of grace in sovereign predestination. How I thank God for electing love! How I praise him for absolute predestination! The Savior is about to tell his disciples that one of their number is a devil, a betrayer, a reprobate vessel of wrath; but first he assures them and us that God’s purpose of grace is sure (vv. 18-19). He says, “*I know whom I have chosen.*” He declares, “*The Scripture must be fulfilled, he that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me*” (See Psalm 41:9). Divine prophecy must be fulfilled. The purpose of God must and shall be accomplished.

Our Lord made his reason for telling his disciples exactly what God’s purpose for Judas perfectly clear. He said, “*Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am [he].*”

The Betrayer

The Lord God our Savior knows whom he has chosen. The purpose of God is sure. God does everything he does to make all men know that he is God, to glorify himself in Christ, and make all men know and confess that the man Christ Jesus is Jehovah God, the “*I Am!*”

Now, with those assurances given, let us see clearly what God the Holy Spirit here reveals to us about Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. The lessons set before us in the character and conduct of that vile, base, reprobate man are many and alarming. Yet, we are specifically told that the things written here were given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit for our consolation (Romans 15:4).

1st. **Lost people often enjoy great advantages by which their guilt is aggravated and their condemnation is increased.** Certainly that was the case with Judas. Judas Iscariot was given many great advantages over other men. He had the privilege of being in the company of the Lord Jesus Christ almost constantly for nearly three and a half years. He saw all the miracles performed by our Lord Jesus. He heard our Savior’s sermons in public, and the private instructions given just to his disciples. Judas was in the daily habit of conversing with the Son of God, of conversing with that Man “*who spake as never man spake.*”

Those were great advantages indeed; but Judas enjoyed even greater privileges and advantages. If we consider nothing except what is before us in this chapter, what countless tokens of our Savior’s kindness, goodness, mercy, and grace Judas observed. — The Lord Jesus washed his feet!

When the betrayer again took his seat at the table, the Lamb of God spoke so gently in declaring that one of those sitting at the table with him would betray him, that the Savior’s words would have broken any man’s heart and would have stung any conscience to the quick, except the hard, obstinate heart and seared conscience of Judas Iscariot. Could any arrow of conviction have reached his heart, surely the words spoken by our Redeemer in this chapter and the deeds he performed would have pierced the steel of his soul. But there he sat, hard and unmoved by the most tender words and actions imaginable, hardened with determined guilt.

While all the other Apostles trembled with horrid fear at the bare thought that one of them could do such a thing, that one of them could betray the Master, Judas sat, like a volcano, with all the fire of hellish malice burning within, until the Lord Jesus finally gave him the fatal sop by which the traitor was marked. Then, only then, he withdrew.

Still, the hardness of his heart, the determination with which he pursued his hatred of the Lord Jesus is made manifest in what he did as soon as he left the table. Though it was now night, (O what night, what darkness possessed his soul!), Judas went immediately to Jerusalem, a two mile walk from Bethany. There he made his pact with the chief priests (Matthew 26:14-16).

As he walked by night to perform his dastardly deed, all through that long, solitary walk, it appears that Judas did not have so much as a slight pricking of conscience, not the slightest compunction. In fact, judging by the only records we have (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), there is no indication that Judas felt or knew even the slightest measure of hesitation for the next two days and nights. There is no indication that his heart was even momentarily softened.

On the contrary, the very next thing we see him doing is taking his place with the Lord Jesus and the other Apostles at the Passover, and actually receiving the Lord’s Supper from the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he had already agreed to betray, as if a he were a faithful disciple! The Savior washed his feet. The Lord Jesus gave him the bread and wine. Judas joined in the closing hymn!

As all tenderness was lost upon that hardened wretch, so the alarms of judgment had no effect upon him. When Judas daringly led that band of men and officers who came to arrest the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane, and they all fell to the ground when the Lord Jesus asked, “*whom seek ye?*” and then declared himself to be Jehovah, the “*I AM,*” when they all fell away backward to the ground, Judas was among them (John 18:2-9).

But neither miracles, nor acts of kindness, nor privileges, nor acts of judgment could penetrate or even affect Judas’ hard heart. Satan completely possessed the man, because the Lord himself had given Satan the possession of him. And the last state of that man was worse than the first (Luke 11:26).

Distinguishing Grace

The greatest of opportunities will never convert a sinner. The highest privileges will never give life to a dead sinner. The best of good company cannot save a soul from hell, or even from itself. The best preaching in the world cannot create life and faith in the soul, except it be made effectual by omnipotent grace. Life is God’s

gift. Conviction is the Spirit's work. Faith is by God's operation. Repentance is God turning the soul to himself. — *"Salvation is of the Lord!"*

2nd. **The only difference between Judas and you, the only difference between Judas and me, the only difference between Judas Iscariot and all the host of God's elect is the difference God himself has made and makes by his distinguishing grace.** Read the history of that reprobate man of whom the Lord Jesus said, *"good were it for that man if he had never been born"* (Mark 14:21). There is a line of everlasting distinction drawn between the precious and the vile, between the righteous and the wicked, between *"him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not"* (Malachi 3:18). And that line of distinction, drawn by the finger of God from everlasting, is continually drawn by the finger of God in providence and in grace (1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Though all God's elect were ruined in the sin and fall of our father Adam, though all are born with the same depraved nature, both the elect and the reprobate, the Word of God clearly distinguishes the seed of the serpent and the seed of Christ (Jude 4-11).

God's elect, because we are blessed of God to be in an everlasting union of grace with Christ, are sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called. But Jude tells us that the reprobate were of old ordained to this condemnation. And, as the descendants of Cain, they have run and do run greedily after the error of Balaam and shall perish in the gainsaying of Core.

The Lord Jesus himself declares of all the Judas seed of Adam's apostate race, *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do"* (John 8:44). The Apostle John makes this same distinction (1 John 3:5-12).

Judas was not merely tempted of the devil, he was a devil; and Satan entered into him and took complete possession of him (John 6:70). Yet, you and I are exactly like Judas. We are in every way as vile, hard, and unrelenting in wickedness and determined evil as he was. Why, then, is Judas an heir of everlasting darkness and torment, while you and I to whom God has given faith in Christ are heirs of light and everlasting blessedness? Only one answer can be found. The Savior says, *"I know whom I have chosen!"* Oh, thank God for electing love!

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

God's Glory

Our Savior assured us that God's purpose of grace in election and predestination is firm and unalterable. Then we are given a picture of both man's depravity and God's distinguishing grace in Judas the betrayer. Now, look at verses 30-31, and rejoice in the fact that even Judas and his horrid betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ was ordained of God, overruled by God, and used by God our heavenly Father to accomplish our redemption and the glory of God in our redemption by Christ.

"He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night. Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him."

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, was glorified by the accomplishment of redemption in his death, by Judas betrayal. And the redemption of our souls by the sin-atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ was and is the glorifying of the triune God.

Chapter 94
Preparing for a Fall
Christ Glorified in His People

“Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 13:31-14:1)

In this passage we find the Lord Jesus alone at last with his eleven faithful disciples. The traitor, Judas Iscariot, has left the room. He has gone out to do his wicked deed of darkness. Freed from the betrayer’s painful company, our Lord opens his heart to his little flock more fully than he had ever opened himself to them before. Speaking to his disciples for the last time before his arrest, his mock trial, his sufferings, and his death as our blessed Substitute, our dear Savior begins a discourse which is unsurpassed by any portion of Holy Scripture. The message begins in John 13:31 and runs through John 16:33, and is concluded with the Lord’s great High Priestly prayer in John 17.

In the portion of Scripture now before us, our Lord Jesus declares that he is glorified as the Son of Man, that the Triune God is glorified in him, and that the Triune God glorifies him in himself. Then he shows us how he glorifies himself in his people. May God the Holy Spirit, whose Word we have before us, be our Teacher.

Just the Family

First, we see the Lord Jesus being alone with his family. — “*Therefore, when he was gone out...*” (v. 31). — No sooner was *Judas* gone out, than the Lord Jesus said, “*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.*” When the traitor finally departed, the Savior was left alone with his beloved family, his children, his mystical body, his Church. In these eleven disciples, his chosen Church, the Lord Jesus was glorified; and they were made everlastingly happy and blessed in him. The three Persons of the Triune God were glorified in the Man, Christ Jesus, as our Mediator and Covenant Surety; and the Triune Jehovah is glorified in his people.

These eleven disciples were at that time the representatives of Christ’s whole body the Church. As such, when Judas (representing his father, the devil and all the seed of the serpent) was gone out, the Lord Jesus was left alone with his family. Thus, Christ was glorified. So it will be in that great day, when sin, and Satan, and all the seed of the serpent (all the Judases of every generation) shall be gone out forever. What a glorious day of God and our souls that eternal day will be, when God our Savior makes all things new, when he has removed the very slime of the serpent from all his creation (Isaiah 60:14; Psalm 125:3).

Christ’s Glory

Second, we see Christ’s glory as our Redeemer, as the Son of Man, and him glorifying the Triune Jehovah, our God (vv. 31-32).

“Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.”

The Savior’s words here may and should be applied to many things; but it seems obvious to me that he is specifically talking about his own crucifixion and death upon the cursed tree as the thing by which he has

been and is glorified and by which the Triune God is glorified. It is as though he had said, “The time of my crucifixion is at hand. My work on earth is finished. An event is about to take place tomorrow, which, however painful to you who love me, is in reality that which is most glorifying both to me and my Father.”

How dark and mysterious those words must have been to the Lord’s disciples! Obviously, none of them understood what the Lord was talking about. If I had been sitting there, I would not have had a clue what he was talking about. — Would you?

Even if they had understood that he was talking about dying upon the cross, in all the agony of that cursed death, in all the shame, ignominy, and humiliation which it entailed, in all that they saw and heard of next day, in the Son of Man hanging naked for six hours between two thieves, in all this there was no appearance of glory, not even a hint of anything glorious. On the contrary, all they saw in the Savior’s death at the time it took place was shame, disappointment, and dismay. Yet, our Lord declares that this is his glory and his Father’s glory.

The death of Christ upon the cursed tree brought glory to God the Father. It glorified his wisdom, faithfulness, holiness, and love. It showed him wise, in providing a way whereby he could be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. It showed him faithful, in keeping his promise, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. It showed him holy, in requiring his law’s demands to be satisfied by our great Substitute. It showed him loving, in providing such a Mediator, such a Redeemer, and such a Friend for sinners as Christ is (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10).

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, as our Mediator and Covenant Surety, brought glory to God the Son. It glorified his compassion, his patient obedience, and his power. It showed him compassionate, loving, and gracious in laying down his life for us, suffering in our stead, being made sin and a curse for us, and obtaining our redemption by the price of his own precious blood. It showed his patient obedience, in not dying the common death of most men, but in willingly submitting to such horrors and unknown agonies as no mind can conceive, when with a word he could have summoned his Father’s angels, and been set free. He was “*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!*” Christ our Savior glorified God the Father in his death by his obedience unto death, by our obedience unto death in him, and by his success in the accomplishment of redemption by his death. Our Savior’s accomplished death at Calvary showed him powerful, in vanquishing Satan and despoiling him of his prey, even as he bare in his body all the weight of all our transgressions and all our guilt!

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ glorified God the Holy Spirit in that he was justified in the Spirit. It is the glory of God the Holy Spirit to take the things of Christ and show them to chosen, redeemed sinners, to apply the Savior’s blood to his redeemed, to make the ransomed of the Lord new creatures in Christ in the new birth, to make us partakers of the divine nature, to seal and comfort God’s elect, and to keep and preserve us in Christ unto everlasting glory.

Forever let us cherish such thoughts about the sacrifice and death of our blessed Savior. The idolatrous paintings and sculptures of men can never portray what took place at Calvary. The length and breadth and depth and height of the work transacted on the cross — God’s law honored and our sins borne in a Substitute, — transferred sin and transferred guilt, — sin punished in a Substitute and free salvation flowing to sinners through the crucified God-man — these are things that can be known only by divine revelation, only by the experience of grace. They cannot be explained, only believed, adored, and praised. — “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 6:14).

A Time of Separation

Third, in verse 33, our Lord Jesus tells us that there must be a time of separation between us and him. — “*Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.*” — How greatly we feel the separation!

“For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh *is* more needful for you.” (Philippians 1:21-24)

Our Savior said, “*Whither I go ye cannot come*” in verse 33; but, oh, how we ought to thank God that his words do not end there. He expands his meaning in verse 36. — “*Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.*”

We cannot follow him now; but we shall follow him soon. The Lord Jesus leaves us here for a set time. And he has left us here for specific purposes. During this time of separation, while we are in this world, our blessed Lord Jesus glorifies himself in us by proving in us the sufficiency of his grace (1 Corinthians 10:13), the blessedness of his gift of faith, and his own faithfulness. It is during this time of separation that our Savior allows us to serve him and the interests of his kingdom, glorifying himself in the use of such things as we are (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). But when our work on earth is done, then, we shall depart to be with Christ forever!

In the last worship service he was able to attend, just a few days before the Lord called him home to glory, Pastor Scott Richardson’s said to the saints at Fairmont, WV...

“I’ve come across some things that helped me and I want to pass them on to you. We understand more about what heaven is and will be to us, by what it is not, and will not be. There’ll be no more sin, no more darkness, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more jail, no more crying, no more war, no more sickness, no more heartache, no more dying in a ditch, no more fear, no more confusion, no more lacking anything, no more vanity, no more waiting, no more going astray, no more reproach, no more affliction, no more darkness, no more trouble, no more curse, no more dishonoring God. Our name will no more be called Jacob. We’ll be the children of the Living God.

‘And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.’

And when we take our last breath and go out into that world, we’ll feel good about it since we know a little more about it, what it will be. And I myself, experience it every day. I know that I’m going to die, not very long; and I’ll be glad if I make one turn over in bed tonight and go to sleep. I’ll be happy about it, cause heaven is my happiness. The Lord bless us.”

Oh, what a day that will be when the company of Judas is no more; and when the Judas of my own wretched heart is gone forever!

A New Law

Fourth, in verses 34-35, our Lord Jesus gives his chosen a new law by which our lives are to be governed in all things. The Lord Jesus glorifies himself in us by putting his law in our hearts, causing us to walk in his steps, motivated and governed by that love wherewith he loved us.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

If you are at all familiar with your Bible, you know that is not a new commandment. Even the rich young ruler understood that the essence of the law is that we love God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. So why did the Savior say, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*”?

The old law said, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor, as thyself.*” Here the Savior says, “*Love one another, as I have loved you.*” — “*As I have loved you.*” That is the example we are to follow. — “*As I have loved you.*” That is the motivation. — “*As I have loved you.*” That is the inspiration of love.

This new law is the law of God now written upon the hearts of God's elect in the new birth, not the old law written upon tables of stone. This new law of love arises from and always accompanies faith in Christ (1 John 3:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Preparation for a Fall

Fifth, the Lord Jesus very graciously prepares his beloved disciple, Peter, for a terrible fall.

“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.” (John 13:36-38)

Peter was far too confident in himself. He said, “*I will lay down my life for thy sake.*” The Lord Jesus warned him of that terrible fall by which Peter's pride would and must be broken. — “*Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.*” But never was our Savior more glorious in the exercise of his free grace and matchless goodness than in his next word to Peter. — “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*” (John 14:1).

O how greatly our great Savior glorifies himself by his restoring mercy, love, and grace! Read Mark 16:7 and John 21:15-17. Bless his holy name forever, his covenant is sure. He will not let the objects of his love destroy themselves!

“And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.” (Jeremiah 32:38-41)

Amen.

Chapter 95
Relief for Troubled Hearts

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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.”
(John 14:1-3)

The three verses before us are rich in precious Gospel truth. For more than 2000 years, they have been peculiarly precious to God's elect throughout the world. Many are the hospital rooms which they have lightened. Many are the dying hearts which they have cheered. May God the Holy Spirit give us the comfort these precious words spoken by our dear Lord Jesus are intended to convey.

Heart Trouble

First, we have in this passage very precious relief for a very old problem. The problem is heart trouble. The relief is faith in Christ. — “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*” (John 14:1).

Heart trouble is the most common thing in the world. No rank, or class, or condition is exempt from it. No bars, or bolts, or locks can keep it out. Heart trouble comes partly from inward things and partly from outward things, partly from the body and partly from the mind, partly from that which we love and partly from that which we fear, partly from things we cherish and partly from things we despise.

The journey of life is full of trouble. Even the most faithful believer has many bitter cups to drink between grace and glory. Even those who walk in the closest communion with the Savior find this world a vale of tears. All of Zion's pilgrims must pass through waters of trouble, rivers of pain, and fires of adversity. — “*We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22). There are Philistines without and Canaanites within who constantly wage war against our souls. Sooner or later, we all must face the Giant Despair. Sooner or later, we all must walk through Doubting Castle. Sooner or later, we all must be bound in the Dungeon of Darkness. Sooner or later, we all must be sifted as wheat.

No Break

When we read John 14, we should always consciously remember that there is no break between chapters 13 and 14. Our Lord Jesus is continuing the discourse he began after washing the disciples' feet and the scene of Judas leaving him and the eleven faithful disciples to make his plans to betray the Master.

There may have been a slight pause after Judas left, as he turned again to the whole body of the Apostles; but there may have been no pause at all, as if to indicate that what Judas was about to do was in no way contrary to his purpose. Be that as it may, the place, the time, and the audience are all the same.

Our Lord's great object throughout this and the two following chapters seems clear. — His intent is to comfort, stablish, and build up his downcast, heart troubled disciples. Our blessed Savior saw that their hearts were troubled by many things. They had seen him, their Master, whom they loved so dearly, “*troubled in Spirit*” (13:21). Their carnal, Jewish expectations of a temporal kingdom under a temporal Messiah were now shattered. The Lord Jesus had just told them that one of them would betray him. They had all watched Judas get up and walk out of the room. The Lord Jesus had just announced that he would only be with them a little while longer. Then, at last, he told them that they could not go with him. And the Lord Jesus had just told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rising of the morning sun. — “*The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*”

For all these reasons, this little band of weak believers was disquieted, troubled at heart, cast down, anxious, and fearful. The Master saw it and proceeded to give them this sweet, blessed word of encouragement: — “*Let not your heart be troubled.*” Note this, too: — Our blessed Redeemer used the singular, “*your heart,*” not the plural, “*your hearts.*” He was saying particularly to Peter, “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*” He was saying to them all, collectively, “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*” And he was saying to you and me, to all his own, “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*”

Only One Relief

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only real relief for troubled hearts. To believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back more completely upon him is the prescription our Master gives all his beloved disciples. No doubt, the members of that little band which sat round the table at the last supper were believers already. They had proved the reality of their faith by giving up everything for Christ's sake. Yet, once more, he presses on them and on us the old, much needed lesson, the lesson with which they first began: — "Believe! Believe more! Believe on Me!" — "*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him*" (Colossians 2:6).

Our Savior's words, "*Ye believe in God, believe also in me,*" have caused much confusion to some; but the confusion is needless. The Lord Jesus was not implying that faith in God, and faith in him as the God-man Mediator were different. There is no faith in God apart from faith in Christ. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and David, like all believers in the Old Testament, believed in the Savior, just as we do.

So why did our Master say to his disciples, "*Ye believe in God, believe also in me?*" The words should be read as a double imperative. The Master was saying, "Believe! Believe! Believe God! Believe me!" They might even be read as a double indicative: — "You believe God and you believe me. So stop letting your heart be troubled."

Still, we should never forget that between faith in Christ and strong faith in Christ there is a great gulf. There are degrees of faith. Some believers are weak in faith, and some are strong in faith. Those who are strong in faith are very often very weak in faith. And those who are weak in faith are often strong in faith. Some of the martyrs who were burned at the stake, at first recanted; but later proved themselves strong, and sealed their testimonies with their blood.

We have all had to say, with the man who brought his demon possessed son to the Savior, "*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*" (Mark 9:24). But the weakest faith in Christ is saving faith. It should never be despised. Yet, weak faith is often the cause of great heart trouble. Vagueness and dimness of perception, fearfulness and fretfulness are the defects of weak faith. The disciples on the storm tossed sea were, at the time, weak in faith, though they were truly strong believers. The Master said to them, "*How is it that ye have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40).

When we are doubtful and weak in faith, we do not see clearly whom we believe, what we believe, and why we believe. At such times, more faith is the one thing needed. Like Peter on the water, we need to look more steadily and firmly, more confidently and fully to the Lord Jesus, and less at the waves and wind. It is written, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee*" (Isaiah 26:3).

Faith in Christ is the only real relief there is for heart trouble (1 Peter 5:6-7; Psalm 121:1-8).

Our Heavenly Home

We have, *secondly*, in this passage a very sweet and comfortable description of heaven and the blessed abode that awaits us on the other side of the grave. What a home our eternal home in heaven must be! We understand very little about heaven while we are here in the body. And the little that is revealed to us in the Scriptures is revealed more by negative than by positive statements. We know much more about what will not be there than we do about what will be there. But here the Lord Jesus assures us of four distinct things about our heavenly home. — "*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.*"

1. Heaven is the "*Father's house.*" "*In my Father's house!*" — Heaven is the house of that God of whom the blessed Savior said, "*I go to my Father and your Father.*" Heaven is our Father's house. In other words, heaven is home: the home of Christ and his people. This is a sweet and touching expression. Home is the place where we are loved for our own sakes, and not for our gifts or possessions. Home is the place where we are always loved, and loved to the end. Home is the place where we are never forgotten, and always welcome. We are in a strange land here. In heaven we will be home. In the life to come we will be at home forever.

2. Heaven is a place of “*mansions.*” — It is a place of rich, lavish, lasting, permanent, and eternal dwellings. Here in the body we are in temporary lodgings, tents, and tabernacles. In these tabernacles of clay we experience many changes, both bad and good, both painful and pleasing. In heaven we shall be settled at last, and go out no more. — “*Here we have no continuing city*” (Hebrews 13:14). Our house not made with hands shall never be taken down. It shall never undergo change (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:9).
3. Heaven is a place of “*many mansions,*” not just mansions, but “*many mansions.*” — There will be room for all believers and room for all sorts, for little saints as well as great ones, for the weakest believer as well as for the strongest. The feeblest child of God need not fear there will be no place for him. None will be shut out but impenitent sinners and obstinate unbelievers. In heaven there are many mansions, because a great multitude shall dwell there with the Lord forever (Revelation 5:11-14; 7:1-17; 14:1-4; 19:1-9).
4. Heaven is a place where Christ himself dwells forever. — And he is not content to dwell there without us! — “*Where I am, there ye shall be also*” is his promise. We should never imagine that we are alone, or that we shall ever be alone or neglected. Christ is our ever present God and Savior; and he shall be with us and us with him forever (John 17:24). “*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*” Our Saviour, our elder Brother, our Redeemer, who loved us and gave himself for us, shall be in the midst of us forever. What we shall see and whom we shall see in heaven, we cannot fully conceive yet, while we are in the body. But one thing is certain: — We shall see Christ. And “*when we see him, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is!*”

O blessed hope! O sweet consolation! To the worldly and careless and unbelieving these things may seem to be the empty dreams of deluded and ignorant men and women full of religious superstition; but to all who feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of God, to all in whom the Son of God dwells, they are full of unspeakable comfort, and fill our souls with joyful anticipation, as we look “*for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 21).

Good Things to Come

Thirdly, we have in verse 3 solid ground for expecting good things to come. — “*I go to prepare a place for you.*” — Sweet, sweet promise! Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people: a place which the Lord Jesus Christ himself has made ready for us. He has prepared it by procuring a right for every sinner who believes to enter in by the merit of his obedience and the merit of his blood. None can stop us and say we have no business there. Our Lord Jesus has prepared it by going before us as our Head and Representative, and taking possession of it as our Forerunner, the Head, Representative, and Forerunner of all the members of his mystical body, the Church. As our Forerunner, he has marched in, leading captivity captive, and has planted his banner in the land of glory. He has prepared it by carrying our names with him as our High Priest into the holy of holies and making angels ready to receive us. When we enter the gates of heaven, we will find that we are neither unknown nor unexpected.

“*I will come again and receive you unto myself.*” — Our Lord Jesus Christ will not wait for us to come up to him. He will come down to us, to raise us from our graves and escort us to our heavenly home. As Joseph came to meet Jacob, so the Lord Jesus will come to call his people together and guide us to our eternal inheritance in heaven.

The second advent ought never to be forgotten. We do not think of it as we should, with constant expectation, standing as it were upon the tiptoe of faith and expectation. Great is the blessedness of looking back to Christ coming the first time to suffer and die for us as our sin-atoning Substitute. But let us never forget the glory that must and shall follow his sufferings (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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.”

Chapter 96
Seven Promises

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me...But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”
(John 14:1-31)

All the promises of God are in Christ Jesus; and all the promises of God in Christ Jesus are sure promises. They are all “*yea and amen.*” Here in John 14 we have seven of God’s great yea and amen promises that fell from the lips of our blessed Savior just before he died as our sin-atonement Substitute at Calvary. Grace was poured into his lips when he stood forth as our covenant Surety before the world was made (Psalms 45:2); and grace poured out of his lips as he prepared his disciples for the troubles they would face in this world.

Everything in this blessed chapter is intended by our dear Savior to comfort our hearts, strengthen our souls, and steady our spirits in a world of woe. May God the Holy Spirit graciously write them upon our hearts.

1. Our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is coming again (vv. 1-3).

I find it delightful that the very first thing our Redeemer promised his disciples, after telling them that he was going away, was “*I will come again!*” He was going away to die for us, to obtain eternal redemption for us, to prepare a place for us, to be our Advocate and High Priest in heaven, to make intercession for us, going away to save all his chosen, blood-bought people by the power of his grace. But the very first thing our Redeemer promised his disciples, after telling them that he was going away, was “*I will come again!*”

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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.”

“*I will come again and receive you unto myself.*” — Christ will not wait for us to come up to him. He will come down to us, to raise us from our graves and escort us to our heavenly home. As Joseph came to meet Jacob, so the Lord Jesus will come to call his people together and guide us to our eternal inheritance in heaven. O Spirit of God, give us grace ever to live in the immediate expectation of our Savior’s glorious second advent, anticipating the fulfilment of that “*blessed hope,*” the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

2. There is a way to God, a way to heaven, a way to eternal life and salvation (vv. 4-11).

There is a sure way of salvation for poor, needy sinners; and that Way is Christ himself. Jesus Christ himself is Salvation (vv. 4-11).

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.”

Christ is the Way. Without him there’s no going. He is the Way, not a way, the Way of salvation.

Salvation is by his obedience alone. Salvation is by his death alone. Salvation is by his grace alone. — “*Salvation is of the Lord!*”

Christ is the Truth. Without him there’s no knowing. He alone is the Truth, the very embodiment of all Truth. He alone reveals the Truth. He alone makes God known to men. And he alone is faithful and true.

Christ is the Life. Without him there’s no living. Christ is the Author and Giver of life: natural, spiritual, and eternal. He is the only Way of life, “*the living way.*” He always has been, and ever will be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. All who are in the Way, know the Truth, and have the Life. None shall ever be put out of the Way. None shall ever depart from the Truth. And none shall ever die who have the Life!

“*No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*” — Christ is the only way of access to the Father. There is no coming to God by your works. There is no coming to God by religious duties and ceremonies. There is no coming to God without a Mediator; and the only Mediator between God and man is the man Christ Jesus.

3. The Lord Jesus promises us that his cause in this world is never in jeopardy.

The purpose of God never alters. The cause of God is never injured. The Church of God is always safe. And the glory of God is always sure (vv. 12-14).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it.*”

As if to endear himself yet the more to our hearts and to convince us that his whole heart and soul is ours (Jeremiah 32:41), our Lord Jesus urges us to continually send our hearts’ desires and prayers to him in heaven, that he might present them to his and our Father (Hebrews 4:16). And he assures us, that *whatsoever we should ask the Father in his name he will do it for us, that the Father might be glorified in the Son.* — What a promise!

He who is possessed by the desire that God may be glorified has in this assurance a wondrous promise before him of successful, effectual prayer. To pray in Christ’s name is to identify ourselves with him who ever seeks the fulfillment of the will and purpose of God. Such prayer is always effectual prayer.

4. God the Holy Spirit will abide with us, dwell in us, keep us, and comfort us forever.

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (vv. 15-17).

5. Throughout the days of our sojourn through this vale of tears, our blessed Savior has promised that he will come to us with his all-sufficient grace.

This is the promise set before us in verses 18-24.

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”

“*I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*” — The Son of God promises to come to each of his elect in the power of his saving grace and to come to every believing sinner, every sinner saved by his grace, in restoring mercy when he falls, reviving grace when his soul languishes, and sufficient grace as needed. Then he says, “*Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me.*” We see him by faith, through the eyes of faith he created in us, and by the light he gives us. And then our dear Savior declares, “*Because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*” — O blessed, wondrous, indescribable union!

6. Our Savior promises us that God the Holy Spirit, the Divine Comforter, will be our Teacher.

“These things have I spoken unto you, being *yet* present with you. But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (vv. 25-26).

He comforts us by teaching us all things, by giving us the mind of Christ, by giving us spiritual understanding, by bringing to our remembrance the sweet revelations of grace in the Gospel (Isaiah 40:1-2).

7. The Son of God has promised to keep us in peace.

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father” (vv. 27-28).

If they had known, how they would have rejoiced! He was going to the Father as our Surety and Savior, as our God-man Mediator, as Jehovah’s Righteous Servant, having accomplish all his covenant engagements, to obtain eternal redemption by his blood! — Read on...

“For my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (vv. 28-31).

Blessed Lord Jesus, almighty Preacher, give us grace to sit at Your feet and hear by faith Your sweet, omnipotent voice in this great message, in each of these great promises. Graciously cause them to sink deep into our hearts. You are indeed the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. By You alone we have access to God. We own none but You. We claim none but you. We plead none but You.

Thank You, blessed Savior, for the gift of Your Spirit, God our Comforter! Thank you, O Holy Ghost, for constantly showing us the things of Christ, for constantly reminding us of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, for constantly turning us to Him, even as we turn ourselves from Him! Thank You for sealing us with Your grace and never leaving us.

O Father of mercies, God of all grace, we bless and praise Your holy name forever for Your free, everlasting love by which You have given us Your dear Son and all the grace of Your Holy Spirit. — “*Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!*”

Chapter 97
Wondrous Mystery

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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.”

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.”

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” (John 14:1-20)

God the Holy Spirit tells us that there are two things revealed in the gospel that are great mysteries, just two. There are many mysteries revealed in the gospel; but only two are singled out with special emphasis by the Spirit of God as “*great*” mysteries. The first is the mystery of the incarnation.

(1 Timothy 3:16) “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

The union of deity and humanity is a mystery no mortal can comprehend. We believe it. We rejoice in it. We hang our souls upon it. — “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!*” But no man can fully understand, let alone explain the great mystery of godliness.

Ephesians 5 sets the second great mystery of the gospel before us.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:25-32)

This is truly a great mystery. Like the mystery of the incarnation, it is a mystery no mortal can comprehend. We believe it. We rejoice in it. We hang our souls upon it. — “*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,*” spiritually bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh! But no man can fully understand, let alone explain the great mystery of the union of God’s elect with Christ.

The depths of this subject are utterly unfathomable. The most brilliant, the most well-taught, the most spiritual mind can never find the bottom of this great ocean. May God the Holy Spirit take us by the hand and lead us as we wade around in these sweet, refreshing waters of grace. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:27 that this is a mystery that is both rich and glorious. There is a world of glorious riches in this matchless mystery!

Three Great Unions

In the passage before us (John 14:1-20) our Lord Jesus declares that this great mystery is the thing that God the Holy Spirit reveals in us and to us, by which he gives us the comfort and assurance of grace and salvation. Look at verse 20 particularly. — “*At that day,*” at that day when God the Holy Spirit is given to you, on the day he creates faith in you, at the time he comes into you as the Spirit of life, to abide in you forever and comfort you — “*At that day,*” the Son of God says, “*ye shall know*” these three things:

1. “*I am in my Father.*” — All who are taught of God the Holy Spirit understand by divine revelation that there is a union between the man Christ Jesus and God the Father, between our humanity and the Son of God, that that man who is our Savior and the eternal God are one. Sweet comfort that is to our souls! That is the foundation of all comfort to our souls.
2. “*Ye (are) in me.*” — Every sinner taught of God, all who are given life and faith in Christ, are made to understand that Christ is their Representative and Substitute. We rejoice to know, by divine illumination, that God the Father made his Son a public person, the Representative, Surety, and Substitute of our souls from everlasting (Proverbs 8). That means that he stood in our room and place; he stood in our stead from eternity.
3. “*And I (am) in you.*” — The Savior is saying, “You shall know, in the very day that I give my Spirit to you, that I am in you.”

Eternal Union

The Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote that this “union of Jesus Christ and his saints is a great and eminent mystery of the gospel, and the greatest hope of glory.” — “*At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*” As God is in Christ and Christ is in him, so we who are born of God are in Christ and Christ is in us. That is the one thing I want to communicate to you in this study. If you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are born of God, you and Christ are one. Imagine that. — You and Christ are one, not two, one!

By God’s sov’ reign grace united
To His Son eternally,
I can never be divided
From my cov’nant Surety.
God’s free love, from everlasting,
Made me one with His dear Son.
Blessed union, strong, unchanging,
I am with my Savior one!

Once in Christ, in Christ forever.
Thus His promise ever stands.

Life and death and hell together
Cannot tear me from His hands!
Oft I fall, but God unchanging,
Faithful to His cov'nant stands.
He will never charge with sinning
Those for whom His Son was slain.

One with Jesus, one with Jesus,
By eternal union one!
One with Jesus, one with Jesus,
O what wonders grace has done!
One with Christ from everlasting!
One with Him upon the tree!
One with Him on high ascending!
One with Him eternally!

In the New Testament the nature of the union of Christ and his church is set before us everywhere. It is so constantly and so clearly set forth that it cannot be missed, except by those who choose not to see it. Every act of Christ on earth is set forth in the Scriptures of truth as being, in some way, connected with his union with us and our union with him. Was he circumcised? We are circumcised in him (Colossians 2:11). Was he crucified? We were crucified with him (Galatians 2:20). Did he die? We died with him (Romans 6:8). Was he buried in the tomb? We are buried with him (Romans 6:4). Was he raised up from the dead? We were risen together with him (Colossians 2:12). Did he ascend on high and sit down in glory? God has made us sit together in heavenly places in him (Ephesians 2:6). Does he live? He lives in me (Galatians 2:20).

In the Book of God this union of Christ and his members is traced out in everything our Lord did, in every act of obedience, and in everything he suffered during his transitory abode upon earth, and in everything he has received in his glory because of his obedience to the Father as our Surety and Substitute. The Scriptures show us, in the clearest and most prominent light, that there is an eternal union between Christ and his beloved people.

“Twixt Jesus and the chosen race
Subsists a bond of sovereign grace,
That hell, with its infernal train,
Shall ne'er dissolve nor rend in vain

This sacred bond shall never break,
Though earth should to her center shake;
Rest, doubting saint, assured of this,
For God has pledged His holiness.

[He swore but once the deed was done;
'Twas settled by the great Three One;
Christ was appointed to redeem
All that the Father loved in Him.]

Hail! sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!

One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.

This sacred tie forbids their fears,
For all He is or has is theirs;
With Him, their Head, they stand or fall,
Their life, their surety, and their all."

The sinner's Peace, the Daysman He,
Whose blood should set His people free;
On them His fond affections ran,
Before creation's work began.

Blest be the wisdom and the grace,
Th' eternal love and faithfulness,
That's in the gospel scheme revealed,
And is by God the Spirit sealed."

— *John Kent*

This union that exists between us and our Savior is an eternal union. It is a union of pure, free grace, established in the beginning, before ever God made the heavens and the earth, when the Lord Jesus stood forth and was accepted as your Surety in the covenant of grace (Ephesians 1:3-6).

Vital Union

The old writers used to refer to this union as "a vital union;" and they were right in doing so. It is a union that is vital both to Christ and to us. It is vital to us because we cannot exist apart from him, any more than branches severed from the vine can exist apart from the vine (John 15:1-6). Yet, this union is vital to Christ as the God-man Mediator, too. God the Holy Ghost describes us, as being "*the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Commenting on that remarkable declaration of God, John Calvin wrote...

"This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until he is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!"

John Trapp said essentially the same thing.

"Christ, who having voluntarily subjected himself to be our Head, accounts not himself complete without his members. In which respect we have the honour of making Christ perfect as the members do the body."

God's elect are the fulness of him in whom is all fulness. As the Triune God could not be complete without him, he cannot be complete without his people.

Life Union

This union of Christ and our souls is a union of life, life in Christ, life with Christ, and life by Christ, by the mysterious, wondrous extraction of life from Christ.

“And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.”

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Genesis 2:18-24)

Whether Adam fully understood the implications of his words or not I cannot say. But our Lord Jesus Christ knows perfectly well the origin of his spouse. He knows where his church came from. He still wears the mark in his side and the memorial in the palms of his hands and on his feet. Whence came this new Eve, this new mother of all living? Whence came this spouse of the second Adam? She came of the second Adam. She was taken from his side, from his very heart! Have we not read, “*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*”? Had the Lord Jesus never died, he would have abode forever alone, with no help-meet for him, no spouse upon whom to pour out his love. But, since he died, he has brought forth much fruit; and his church, taken from his side, has her life from him, in him, and with him. She is truly bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh! We sprang out of Christ, even as Levi sprang from the loins of Abraham. We live because we receive life from him.

As bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, we are the possession of our Husband, the purchase of his blood, the property of his love, and the object of his relentless devotion and care. Wondrous thought! — We belong to the Son of God. We are his peculiar possession! – The property of his heart! I belong to Christ alone. He bought me with his blood. I am a member “*of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!*”

“‘Tis, done, the great transaction’s, done:
I am my Lord’s and he is mine.
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.
High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”

Manifest Union

This vital union is an eternal union of life, life extracted from him who is Life. Yet, it is a secret union until God the Holy Spirit is given to the chosen, redeemed sinner in the saving operations of his omnipotent grace. And this union of life with Christ is a union that is made manifest in the new birth. The birth of a child is not the beginning of life, but the manifestation of life. So, too, the birth of a new man “*created in righteousness and true holiness*” in regeneration is not the beginning of life, but life and immortality brought to light by the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

“*At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*” Pastor Chris Cunningham once wrote, “I believe men will argue about the new nature up until the time that they have one, and then they will just be grateful to the God of all grace, who makes all things new.” That is exactly what our Savior says in John 14:20. When a sinner has a new nature, in the very day he is born of God, he knows it. You may not have

known what to call it, or how to describe it; but you knew from the beginning of your new life in Christ that it was a new life, that Christ had come into you.

The Warfare

It is this impartation of Christ, the new creation in us, that begins the warfare inside, with which all God's people struggle in this world. How beastly we are by nature! How often God's saints in this world are compelled, like John Newton of old, to sigh...

“If I love, why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?
Hardly sure can they be worse,
Who have never heard His name.”

Many of the doubts and fears God's people experience regarding their saving interest in Christ arise from a failure to realize that every heaven-born soul lives in this world with two natures. In Scripture these two natures are referred to as “*the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,*” and “*the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4:22-24), “*flesh*” and “*spirit*” (Galatians 5:16-17). These two natures are constantly at war, the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

Re-generation not Re-formation

It is commonly assumed that in the new birth man (the natural, carnal man) is changed. That the old man is sanctified, that he who once loved sin is made to love holiness, that the enmity of the heart is slain, and that the old man renewed by grace grows more and more holy in progressive sanctification, until he is ripe for glory and the Lord takes him home.

That fanciful dream deludes multitudes, until, after being born again, they suddenly discover that the old lusts are still there. The discovery is sometimes shocking, simply because we have been taught that they would not be there any longer. How many there are who live in constant turmoil, knowing the abiding evil of their nature, but never daring to acknowledge it, lest they be scorned by others who pretend to be holy.

The new birth is not a *re-formation*, but a *re-generation*. The new birth is not reforming the old nature of fallen man, but a re-creation of life in man by the Spirit of God. The new birth is not transforming that which is sinful into that which is righteous, but the imparting of a new, righteous nature. In the new birth Christ is formed in us, and we are made new in him (Colossians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Two Natures

In every believer there are two natures (sin and righteousness), two men (the old man Adam and the new man Christ), two principles (sin and holiness); and these two constantly oppose one another. This fact is plainly declared in Scripture (Romans 7:14-24; Galatians 5:16-22; Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24). The old man, Adam, can never be sanctified; and the new man created in righteousness and true holiness, “*Christ in you the hope of glory,*” cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

Adam lives in us by birth. By natural generation we are made partakers of Adam's nature. Christ lives in us by the new birth. By regeneration we are made “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4).

Creation and New Creation

God created man in his own image and after his own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). When the Lord God had formed a body for Adam from the dust of the ground, he then “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul*” (Genesis 2:7). Genesis 5:1-2 tell us that all men were created at one time in the creation of Adam. That is to say, every living soul descends by natural generation from Adam, partaking of his nature. All his sons and daughters are begotten in the image of their father, generation after generation (Genesis 5:3; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:12).

Every living soul was created in and simultaneously with “*the first man Adam.*” Being born of Adam, we are all partakers of his nature; and we are called by his name, “*Adam*” (Genesis 5:1-2). As it was in the original creation, so it is in the new creation.

As “*the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 15:45). All quickened spirits were created in and simultaneously with the “*last Adam*” — Christ. No, Christ is not a creature of God. He is God the eternal Son. Yet, he was made our Mediator and covenant Surety. And all, being born of him, “*born of God,*” are made partakers of his nature, as the Holy Spirit declares (2 Peter 1:4). The children of the “*first Adam*” are born of the flesh and are earthy in all their feelings and affections. The children of the “*last Adam*” are born of the Spirit and are heavenly, or spiritual in their feelings and affections. The children of the first Adam are born for the earth. The children of the last Adam are born for heaven. Those of the first are born of corruptible seed. Those of the last are born of incorruptible seed.

In the original creation we were made partakers of Adam’s nature, humanity. In the new creation of grace we are made partakers of the last Adam’s nature, “*the divine nature.*” That is the cause of the warfare within. These two are contrary the one to the other. We wear our Savior’s name. He has given it to us in free justification. And we have his nature. He gives that to us in free sanctification, regeneration. Christ is the Lord our Righteousness in justification (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16), and the Lord our Holiness in sanctification (Hebrews 12:14).

Just as Necessary

In Hebrews 12:14 the Spirit of God tells us that there is a “*holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.*” In Ephesians 4:24 he declares that all who are born of God are born new creatures in Christ Jesus, “*created in righteousness and true holiness.*” That holiness without which none can enter into heaven is the righteousness of God imparted to the heaven-born soul in regeneration, the divine nature of which we are made partakers by grace (2 Peter 1:4). This is the experience of the new birth; and it is just as necessary to the salvation of our souls as the righteousness of Christ imparted to us in justification.

Without question, the new birth is the certain result of our Savior’s accomplishments in his death as our Substitute; but if we have no living union with Christ, his mediatorial accomplishments at Calvary cannot effect our deliverance from the wrath to come. Be sure you understand my meaning. — You cannot go to heaven without a righteous nature (imparted righteousness in sanctification) any more than you can without a righteous record (imputed righteousness in justification). I know some have said, “If you believe that, you’re a lunatic.” If that is so, call me, the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 4:24; Hebrews 12:14), the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:4), the Apostle John (1 John 3:9; Revelation 21:27), and the Son of God (John 14:20) lunatics!

Born of the Spirit

Though the obedience of Christ unto death met all the claims of the law and satisfied divine justice for all the chosen seed, that obedience does not impart to the redeemed a qualification for the enjoyment of heaven. For that we must be born again. — “*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (John 3:5-6).

Here we are presented with two distinct births from two distinct elements, necessarily producing two distinct beings. The flesh produces beings incapable of entering into the kingdom of God. The flesh cannot enter into, understand, or enjoy that which is spiritual, let alone that which is heavenly. As one old writer put it, “If the unregenerate man could enter heaven, he would be so unhappy in heaven that he would ask God to let him run down to hell for shelter.”

But God the Spirit produces beings capable of entering into the kingdom of God, capable of entering, understanding and enjoying that which is spiritual, making all who are born of the Spirit “*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*” (Colossians 1:12). By the new birth, being given faith in Christ, God’s elect are brought into an open and manifest union with Christ; but our experience of it is not the beginning of this union.

The believer’s vital union with Christ the Mediator is an everlasting union of grace. This union between Christ and our souls is, as Spurgeon put it, “the nearest, dearest, closest, most intense, and most enduring relationship that can be imagined.” We live because Christ lives; and our lives are hid with Christ in God. This is a relationship that is closer than that of a husband and wife, or children and their parents.

Mystical Union

This union of Christ and his people is one of the greatest mysteries revealed in the Book of God. — “*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*” (Ephesians 5:30). It is a mystical union of grace. We are members of Christ. We form his mystical body. This is the closest relationship imaginable. It is such a close relationship, such a close union, that the Lord Jesus Christ would be as incomplete without us as we would be without him (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 2:9-10). We are identified with him; and he is identified with us. He has made us essential to himself, just as he has made himself essential to us! He is the head of the body; and we are the members of that body. That is a truly vital union. — “*We are members of his body.*”

Partakers of Christ

As Eve derived her life from Adam (Genesis 2:18-25), so we derive our life from Christ. As Eve was made partaker of Adam’s nature, so we are made partakers of Christ’s nature. As Eve’s life was but an extension of Adam’s life, so our life is but an extension of Christ’s life. He is eternal life; and we have eternal life by the gift of God. That eternal life is “*Christ in you*” (Colossians 1:27). We are partakers his life. Our spiritual life proceeds from and is sustained by Christ. It is the source of our present spiritual life, and of our eternal life in glory with Christ.

Let us never diminish one aspect of our Savior’s work to make another appear more glorious. All that Christ is made to us and all that he does for us is vital. We cannot be saved without his work for us; and we cannot be saved without his work in us. Both are vital.

Astonishing but Real

This union of Christ and our souls is real. Yes, it is a mystical, spiritual union, a union that is indescribably beyond the scope of our puny brains; but it is a real union. There are three great mystical unions revealed in Holy Scripture.

1. The union of the three persons of the Godhead, being one God, is the doctrine of the Trinity (1 John 5:7).
2. The Scriptures also reveal the union of divinity and humanity in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. — “*The Word was made flesh*” (John 1:14).

3. And the Book of God reveals this vital union of God's elect with Christ. Nothing can be more astonishing; but nothing is more real than our union with Christ.

Child of God, try to grasp the reality of this union of you and your Savior. You are one with the Christ of God! You were "*buried with him in baptism unto death,*" wherein also you have risen with him. You were crucified with him upon the cursed tree. You have gone up into heaven with him. God has raised us up together, and made us to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. You are one with Christ! I am one with Christ!

Be astonished, O my soul! Being one with him, the Lord Jesus himself assures us that the Lord God our Father loves us as he loves him! He loves me to the same degree, with the same love, and for the same reason he loves his Son as my Mediator. He loves me and his Son with an everlasting love (John 17:23).

Since we are members of his body, he will one day present us to himself without spot, or wrinkle, or blemish. We will be perfect even as he is perfect. We will enter into the eternal joy in the Lord. We are joint heirs with Christ; therefore whatever he has we shall have.

Faith Union

This is a union that is ours, in the sweet experience of God's saving grace by faith in Christ.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John 14:15-20)

Do you ask, "How can I keep his commandments?" The answer is found in 1 John 3:23. — "*And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*" We keep his commandments by faith in Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and rejoice in this sweet assurance — "*I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine!*" As Christ is in the Father, I am in him and he is in me; and nothing can separate me from him!"

"Because I live," my Savior says,
"You, too, shall live." So, I'm secure.
His Word this blest foundation gives—
Immutable, forever sure!

Here, O my soul, unshaken dwell,
Though vexed by sin, God's promise stands—
Not all the p'wers of earth and hell
Can tear me from my Savior's hands!

I'm one with Christ! Whate'er oppose,
Still, I am His and He is mine!
Not sin, nor hell, nor all my foes
Can make His love for me decline!

O let me never doubt You, Lord!

Faith must upon Your Word rely—
Immutable, eternal Word!
The Word that built both earth and sky!

Dead to the law and sin I am,
With Christ Who bought me with His blood,
And risen with the risen Lamb,
My life is hid with Him in God!

Chapter 98
Warnings or Promises

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman...And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” (John 15:1-27)

On that solemn night before the Lord of life and glory was delivered into the hands of wicked men, he gave his disciples everything that might be needed to comfort their hearts, as he anticipated the trouble that was before them. His final discourse and his final actions, recorded by divine inspiration in John 13-18, are filled with things that are intended by him to encourage our faith in him, to give us confidence and assurance in him. Throughout these chapters, his word to us is, “*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*” If ever there was a time during the whole of our Savior’s earthly ministry in which he wanted to minister comfort and peace to the hearts of his beloved disciples, it was on that solemn night before his sin-atonement death as our Substitute. Like the 23rd Psalm, these chapters are recorded in the Book of God to minister to our souls in times of greatest trouble.

On that solemn night, he said to those disciples, whose faith he knew must soon be greatly tried, “*I have chosen you*” (13:18; 15:16, 19). How sweet a pillow that is for our aching hearts! He told them that one of them was a betrayer who would deliver him up to be crucified. He did so that, when it came to pass, their faith might not be shaken by it (13:18). He told them again of his impending death, assuring them that, by that which he would accomplish in his death, God would be glorified in him and he would be glorified by the Father (13:31-33). Then, he told them that Satan desired to have them, that he might sift them as wheat, and assured them that their faith would not fail, because he had prayed for them (Luke 22:31-32). After that, he turned to Peter and told him plainly that before the night was over he would deny him three times. That assertion was immediately followed by the assurance that his faith would not fail, that he would be recovered (converted) from his horrible fall, and encouraged still to believe him. — “*The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*” (13:38-14:1).

Throughout the night, he said to these disciples, all of whom would forsake him, as he anticipated their great fall, “Believe me! Believe me! Believe me!” He did not say, Believe in me. He did not say, believe my doctrine. He said, “Believe me!” And he assured them that he was going to prepare a place for them in heaven, and that he would bring them to that place, in spite of all that they would be, and do, and experience in the next few hours (14:1-3).

I remind you, again, that the difference between Judas’s sin, which was for him sin unto death, and the sin that would be committed by Peter and the rest of the disciples (as well as yours and mine) was not their deeds, or the extent of their guilt, or the aggravating circumstances of their crimes, or even that one sinned against greater light or more persistently than the other. — The only difference between Judas’s fall and Peter’s, between these disciples forsaking the Lord and Judas betraying him was this: — The Lord Jesus prayed for Peter, those disciples, and us, that their faith and ours fail not; but he did not pray for Judas.

He assures us, though we must ever be kept aware of our sinfulness, that we might ever trust him that he would hear and answer our prayers and give us our hearts’ desire (14:13-14). As he anticipated all the weakness, failure, and sin that those beloved disciples would display in just a few hours, as he anticipated all the weaknesses, failures, and sins we would experience and display in this world, the Lord Jesus assured them and assures us that he will never leave us comfortless, that he will come to us, and that he, and his Father, and his Spirit will abide with us forever (14:16-20). What? Does the Son of God intend for sinners saved by his grace to be assured of his grace even when we fall? Indeed, he does (1 John 2:1-2).

Then, he assures us of his abiding love and tells us that he will manifest himself to us (14:21). Repeatedly, he promised that he would give us his blessed, Holy Spirit to be our Comforter, assuring us that he

will teach us all things. Again, he says, I tell you all these things “*that ye might believe,*” that your faith not be shaken, that your confidence and assurance of my mercy and grace may never be shaken.

Vine and Branches

Then, in chapter 15, the Lord Jesus gives us this wonderful description and assurance of our everlasting union with him. — “*I am the vine, ye are the branches.*”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (vv. 1-6).

The first thing to be learned from this passage is the fact that there is a blessed union between Christ and his people that can never be broken. The Word of God is filled with illustrations of the eternal union of Christ and his Church. This union of Christ and his elect is both eternal and vital. It is vital to us, because without him we cannot live. It is vital to him as our Mediator, because without us he would not be complete (Ephesians 1:23).

In the Song of Solomon, when the Bride sang her nuptial love song, she refers to her Beloved as the Vine. — “*My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi*” (Song of Solomon 1:14). Our blessed Savior is not just a blessing, but a cluster of blessedness (Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31). The word here translated “*cluster*” means “the man that is all things,” or “the man that has atoned and is all things of blessing.” That is what Christ is to us. — “*All things are yours, for ye are Christ’s!*”

Our Lord Jesus, when he would sing his nuptial love song to us, his Bride, his Beloved, uses the very same imagery. — “*I am the vine, ye are the branches.*” So real and absolute is this union of our souls and our Savior that we are spoken of in the Book of God as the vine (Psalm 80:8-19; Song of Solomon 7:11-12; 8:11-13). As the vine and the branches are one, so Christ and his people are one.

The union between Christ and believers is just as close and just as real as the union of the vine and the branches in the vine. In ourselves we have no life, or strength, or spiritual power. All we are and have comes from Christ. We are what we are, and feel what we feel, and do what we do, because we draw a continual supply of grace and help from him. Being grafted into Christ by grace, joined to him by faith, and united in mysterious union with him by the Spirit, we live, drawing the sap of life from him.

And, because we are one with him, vitally joined to him, we bring forth fruit from him and by him. Grace is not a self-operating principle, but the continual operation of God (Hosea 14:8). Of Christ’s fulness we continually receive grace for grace. He declares, — “*From me is thy fruit found*” (Hosea 14:8).

The picture before us is delightful and comforting. Believing sinners never have reason to be in doubt of eternal salvation. Our Savior will never leave us to ourselves, to our own strength, or to our own ability. It is God who works in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Our root is Christ; and all that there is in the Root is for the benefit of the branches. Because he lives, we shall live also. Weak as we are in ourselves, our Root is in heaven, and never dies. “*When I am weak,*” Paul said, “*then am I strong*” (2 Corinthians 12:10). And his strength is demonstrated to be perfect through our weakness.

In the second verse we see that there are many, like Judas, who are in Christ the vine by profession only. They are fruitless branches that appear to be in the vine, but they are not. They do not abide in the Vine. They have not been grafted into the Vine, but are only attached to the Vine in outward appearance. Consequently, they bear no fruit and are useless. They shall be cast forth and burned as useless debris that is found in the vineyard. Are you like that, attached to the Vine, but not in the Vine, attached to the Vine by ritual, but not in the Vine by regeneration, attached to the Vine by profession, but not in the Vine by power, attached to the Vine by a creed in Your Head, but not in the Vine by circumcision of the heart? Let each answer for himself. — Am I merely attached to the Vine? Believers are in Christ the true Vine. We are branches growing out of the Vine. Are you in Christ? If you trust him, you are in him.

The Assurances

Look at the sweet assurances given to us in this tremendous, instructive passage of Holy Scripture. — *“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you”* (v. 3). — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love”* (v. 9). — *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”* (v. 11). — *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (v. 13). — *“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (v. 15). — *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”* (v. 16). — *“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me”* (v. 26). — *“And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning”* (v. 27).

Warnings or Promises

Those sweet assurances are commonly overlooked, because there are several things in this chapter that are commonly interpreted as great, fearful warnings. — *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit”* (v. 2). — *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”* (v. 4). — *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”* (v. 5). — *“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned”* (v. 6). — *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”* (v. 7). — *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples”* (v. 8). — *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love”* (v. 10). — *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (v. 14).

Are we to understand these statements by our Savior as conditions that must be met by us? Are we to understand that if we fail to meet these conditions we will perish at last? Not hardly! Pastor Rupert Rivenbark made this tremendously helpful observation about such passages as these. He said, “If all the ‘ifs’ in the Bible hang on Christ, the believer can claim them all as promises.” That helps, doesn’t it?

When our Savior says, *“Abide in me, and I in you,”* and these other things commonly interpreted as conditions that must be met by us if we are to be confident of our union with him, he is not giving us precepts of conditions, but blessed promises of grace. We abide in him because he abides in us. Our Savior is assuring us that we shall, by the sealing of his blessed Spirit, as our Comforter, abide in him. When our Lord Jesus *“breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost”* (John 20:22), he was not giving a command to obey, but communicating grace. And here, he is telling us that he will continually communicate grace to us by his Spirit, our Comforter, who will continually testify to the believing soul the things of Christ, constantly affirming them to us and in us.

When he says, “*Abide in me and I in you,*” the Lord Jesus assures us that he undertakes for us, that we shall abide in him, and he in us. How else could we ever hope to abide in him? It is as much as if he had said, “Ye *shall* abide in me; and I *shall* abide in you.” And all this is in perfect conformity to that everlasting covenant of grace of which he is the Surety (Jeremiah 32:38-41). This is blessed, absolute, indestructible security. Our Savior says, “I *will* not and they *shall* not.”

Perhaps, you ask, “But are we not to look to our evidences for assurance?” Be sure you get the answer. — NO! Never! The anchor of our souls is altogether outside ourselves (Hebrews 6:16-20; 11:1). Our hope is in the Vine! Only in the Vine. Be sure you are joined to the Vine.

Chapter 99
Self-sufficiency Slain

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:1-8)

“Does it glorify God?” — That is the litmus test by which all doctrine, all preaching, and all teaching must be proved. All the heresies which have arisen in the history of the church have had a decided tendency to dishonor God and to flatter man. Their aim is always the exaltation of man and the abasing of God, the exaltation of man’s imaginary “free will” and the denial of God’s sovereign will, the uplifting of man and the mockery of God. Robbing God of the glory which is due unto his name, false prophets attempt to put a counterfeit luster upon the head of the rebellious and depraved creature.

Human religion magnifies man; but the gospel of the grace of God sinks the creature very low and presents the Lord God, the Triune Jehovah, before us as One sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. This fact is so evident that the most uneducated believer, even if he is incapable of refuting the heresies men everywhere proclaim, is able to spot the devil’s lie with ease. — If it glorifies man, it is not of God. By this test you may judge, and judge infallibly, truth from error. By this rule you may determine whether any doctrine is true or false, orthodox or heretical: — “Does it glorify God?” If it does, it is true. “Does it exalt man?” If it does, it is false.

All gospel doctrine lays man low in the dust and speaks of him in terms which are intended to make him feel his degradation as a sinful, ruined, depraved, helpless, hopeless, undone, God hating rebel. All gospel doctrine puts the crown upon the head of God, not upon the head of man’s free-will, or free agency, or good works. Test everything I preach (and everything preached or written by any other man) by this rule: — “Does it glorify God?”

John 15:1-8 should utterly destroy every thought of self-sufficiency. Because Christ is the true Vine in whom is all life, and grace, and strength, and we are but branches in the Vine, without him we can do nothing. — “*We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

The True Vine

“*I am the true Vine*” (v. 1). — The Lord Jesus compares himself to many things, by which he condescends to teach us who he is, what he has done, is doing, and shall hereafter do for his chosen. By the use of these images, very familiar and simple, the Savior graciously uses common, everyday things to remind us constantly of himself. He said, “*I am the Door; by me if any man enter in he shall be saved.*” There is no other Door. He said, “*I am the true Bread from heaven.*” He alone is the Bread of Life we must have, upon which our souls live. Our Savior says, “*I am the Water of Life.*” He who drinks of this Water shall never thirst. The Master declares, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*” Everything that God has for sinners is in Christ. All things spiritual and eternal are in Christ, by Christ, and through Christ (John 3:35; Colossians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Acceptance, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life, redemption, justification, and sanctification, propitiation, pardon, and peace, holiness here and heaven hereafter, all are ours by a living union with Christ.

He is the true Vine. All life is in the Vine and from the Vine.

Try to imagine the condescension of our Lord Jesus in using this imagery. The Lord of Glory compares himself to a vine to show us the lowliness and meekness of his person. Isaiah described him “*as a root out of a dry ground.*” Nothing in the field appears less promising than a dry vine in the winter. Truly, in the vine there is “*no form nor comeliness that we should desire him.*” Yet, our blessed Savior calls himself “*the True Vine.*” He could not have chosen image more unsightly.

Zechariah said that when the Savior would come with salvation, he would be meek and lowly. Nothing is lower than the vine that spreads its branches along the ground. Nothing is weaker and nothing more feeble than the vine. It has to have something to prop it up, a stake upon which it must be upheld.

Yet, by this comparison, when our Savior says, “*I am the True Vine,*” he also assures us of his own super-abounding grace and infinite fruitfulness and love to us as the people of his choice. What can be more useful than the fruitful vine to the branches growing out of it? Our great “*Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall*” (Genesis 49:22). The fruit of this Vine is like the wine of Lebanon (Hosea 14:7), reviving, exhilarating, and rich. Truly, the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Savior, is that Plant of Renown God promised by his prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34:29).

The Husbandman

“*My Father is the Husbandman.*” — With those words, our Savior gives us another word of sweet assurance, that his joy might remain in us and that our joy might be full (v. 11). Christ is the Vine. We are the branches. The vineyard is the Lord’s. It belongs to and is unceasingly tended by the Almighty God, our heavenly Father. He is the Husbandman, the Vinedresser. He who purposed the Vine planted and supported it for the purposes of his will and for his own glory.

He planted the Vine in the Incarnation (Hebrews 10:5; Galatians 4:4-5). He filled the Vine with his Spirit. He upheld and supported the Vine, and made it strong for himself (Psalm 80:15, 17). The Father made Christ our Vine and made us branches in the Vine, putting everything in him for his own glory (Ephesians 1:11-12). He takes infinite delight in the Vine, this Plant of Renown, “*his pleasant Plant*” (Isaiah 5:7).

“*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*” (v. 2). — This is the Father’s work, as the Husbandman. Robert Hawker suggests that the opening words of this verse would be more accurately translated, “*Every branch that beareth not fruit in me.*” Without question, that is our Lord’s meaning. It is not possible that any can be truly in him and not bear fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

But there are many who appear to be in him who are not: (Judas, Simon Magus, Demas, Diotrephes, etc.). They appear to be in Christ by association, outward profession, and the performance of religious duties; but they bear no spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). Religious duties and what men call good works (works of religious austerity) may be produced without any true spiritual union with Christ (Luke 16:15). — Mere carnal professors are lost religionists; and, as such, are dead branches which will eventually be exposed and taken away.

There are myriads of professing Christians in the world whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. There are some in every local church. Some are joined to Christ by baptism and church-membership. Some go further and are regular in attendance. Many talk loudly about religion and doctrine. But they all lack “*the one thing needful.*” They have no grace in their hearts, no faith in Christ, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ. They are not in Christ; and Christ is not in them. Their union with him is only outward. It is not real. They have “*a name to live,*” but they are dead. Their end will be destruction. They

will be separated from the company of true believers, and cast out, as withered, useless branches, into everlasting fire. They will find at last, whatever they thought in this world, that there is a worm that never dies and a fire that is not quenched.

The true branches, those who are savingly rooted in, joined to, and one with Christ by the Father's will and work, always bring forth fruit by the power and grace of his Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is grace in the soul (Galatians 5:22-23). It is not something men can produce. The fruit of the Spirit is not something men can see. And the fruit of the Spirit is not something men are competent to discern. — You and I are incapable of determining which branches are in the Vine and which are just hanging on the Vine. God alone knows and can distinguish the false from the true.

Dead, withered, fruitless branches that are hanging on the Vine by mere profession, the Vine dresser takes away and burns. Those living branches savingly in the Vine he constantly prunes, cleanses, and purges by trials, afflictions, and instruction that they may grow and bring forth more fruit (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:7; Psalm 119:71).

The Lord God declares, "*From me is thy fruit found*" (Hosea 14:8). Let us never forget it. Christ is the Vine. Every portion of life and fruitfulness comes from him. Grace is not a self acting principle. Grace is not an evolutionary process. Grace is God's gift and God's work. All our springs are in him. — Of his fulness we receive grace for grace. That is to say, we get grace from Christ's fulness day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment. — "*All my springs are in thee*" (Psalm 87:7).

Clean through the Word

"*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you*" (v. 3). — The Lord Jesus had told his disciples in John 13:10 that they were "*clean, but not all,*" because Judas was then still among them. Since Judas was now purged from the Vine, the Savior says to the eleven, "*Ye are clean.*" They were made clean, not by works, not by law, not by baptism, not by ceremonies, but by grace!

They were and all who are born of God are clean, regenerated, sanctified, and justified, by the precious blood of Christ, by the Spirit of God, through the Word preached and believed (Zechariah 13:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Titus 3:4-7). Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ we purify our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). God's elect are blood bought and blood bathed (Zechariah 13:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Titus 3:4-7).

These men were all true branches in the true Vine, Christ Jesus. By the grace of God, they believed in Christ, loved Christ, and were in Christ, never to be separated from him. So it is with all who are born of God (John 10:27-30; Ecclesiastes 3:14; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Abiding in Christ

In verse 4 our Savior says, "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*" — I remind you, this is a promise of grace, not a precept of law. How can you abide in him and he in you, except by his own work? Our Lord is not warning us that if we decide no longer to abide in him, we will cease to bear fruit, wither, die, and be burned forever in hell. I have no idea how that misunderstanding of this verse could cause his joy to remain in anyone, or make anyone's joy full. Remember, that is our Lord's intention in this passage (v. 11). This verse must be understood in the light of that stated intention as a promise of grace.

Our Lord's intent is that his joy remain in us and that our joy be full. That being the case, our Lord's words here must mean: You shall abide in me; and I will abide in you. That is exactly what he promised in his everlasting covenant (Jeremiah 32:38-41). Our abiding in Christ is not a condition which we fulfil before Christ

gives us life, but the result of Christ's gift of life. — *"By the grace of God I am what I am"* (1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Self-sufficiency Slain

Remember, we are looking at a parable, the parable of a vine and branches. And remember that a parable is an earthly picture of a spiritual lesson. The parable may suggest many thoughts; but it is intended to show us just one thing. Read verse 5, and you will see what our Lord's intent is in giving us this parable. — *"I am the Vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* This parable is intended to slay every thought of self-sufficiency. The Lord Jesus says, *"Without me ye can do nothing!"* The sooner we learn that, the better. The more fully we realize it, the better. The more broadly we apply it, the better. — *"Without me ye can do nothing!"*

I know this in theory, as well as I know that I am a sinner; but I am forever failing in this knowledge, when I come to put it into practice. Teach me, O Holy Spirit of God, teach me how to live in the constant realization of this fact. — *"Without me ye can do nothing!"* It is a fact that cannot be denied that neither the judgments of God nor his mercies have the slightest effect upon the heart of man, without his grace.

Robert Hawker wrote...

"Behold the prosperous sinner bathing in a full river of blessings, himself in health, his circumstances flourishing, his children like olive-branches round his table, wealth pouring in upon him from every quarter; and yet he lives without God, and without Christ in the world; and as he lives, so he dies, in the vanity of his mind. See him amidst distinguishing preservations, in battles by sea or land, still preserved, while floating carcasses, or opened graves, are all around him: do these things bring his heart to God? Not in the least. The sum total of his character may be comprised in a few words; 'God is not in all his thoughts.'

Look at him in the opposite side of the representation; let such an one be visited with chastisements, in his own person sickness, in his family misery, in his substance want; in short, in all that concerns him, a life of sorrow, care, anxiety, disappointment, ruin. Perhaps to all these, a body long the dwelling-place of some loathsome disease, under which he groans, and at length dies, and dies the same unawakened sinner as he had lived. And suppose these accumulated evils had been distinguished also with some more peculiar maladies, in perils in the sea, in perils in the war, in perils among men; nay, let him be maimed in his limbs, let him be rotting in a prison, let him be worn out with misery from evil upon evil, like waves of the sea following each other; yet still he continues the hardened, unsubdued sinner under all, and as unconscious of God's rods as the prosperous sinner before described is of God's blessings.

Are these things so, my soul, and hast thou seen them? Yes, in numberless instances. Oh then, learn, that without Jesus thou canst do nothing. Outward circumstances, unaccompanied with inward grace, leave men just where they found them; and plain it is, that grace alone can change the heart. Lord Jesus, let these loud and crying truths, day by day lead my soul to thee! Be thou *'all in all,'* my hope, my guide, my strength, my portion; for *'without thee I can do nothing.'*

"Without me ye can do nothing!" — Outward circumstances, unaccompanied with inward grace leave men just as they find them. Only Christ can change the heart. Only Christ can convert the sinner. Only Christ can save. I say we should apply these words of our Savior as broadly as possible to all things spiritual. — *"Without me ye can do nothing!"* *"Without me ye"* cannot believe. *"Without me ye"* cannot pray. *"Without me ye"* cannot watch. *"Without me ye"* cannot learn, know, or understand anything spiritual. *"Without me ye"* cannot know the meaning of my Word. *"Without me ye"* cannot preach. *"Without me ye"* cannot worship. *"Without me ye"* cannot hear me speak by the gospel. *"Without me ye"* cannot persevere. *"Without me ye"* cannot withstand the

devil. “*Without me ye*” cannot resist temptation. “*Without me ye*” cannot resist sin. “*Without me ye*” cannot stand. “*Without me ye*” cannot recover when fallen. “*Without me ye can do nothing!*” — “*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*” (Romans 9:16).

As these words apply to all men, believers and unbelievers, they are especially applicable to preachers. Let every gospel preacher understand that the Lord Jesus is speaking to him, when he says, “*Without me ye can do nothing.*”

Pastor Henry Mahan wrote...

“I suppose the most difficult thing any believer has to learn is that ‘Without Him we can do nothing.’ This is our creed but not our experience! We will never be effectually used for God’s true glory until it becomes our experience. God will never use men that are proud enough to think themselves necessary or capable. He will throw away the vessel which begins to boast in itself or allows others to boast in it. Whatever is our strength in the flesh is sure to become our weakness in the spirit — whether it be our intelligence, our morality, our length of service, our doctrine, our courage or whatever. Gideon feared the Midianites because of the small number of his soldiers, but the Lord said, ‘Your soldiers are yet too many for me.’ I wonder if we will ever become weak enough, empty enough, and ignorant enough for God to use us for His glory! The logic of the Lord is strange to the natural mind. ‘*For when I am weak, then am I strong*’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). ‘*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Lord must go back to the seashore and raise up some fishermen. — We’ve all become masters and doctors, wise men in theology and great counselors. I disqualify myself for God’s use when I become qualified. My fine talents and lofty credentials become hindrances rather than helps. I thought to prepare myself for great things, only to learn that it was the rough voice in the wilderness He planned to use, not the polished preacher; it was the weak, impulsive shepherd with the sling He planned to use, not the mighty warrior with his armor of wit and arsenal of facts, doctrines, and learning. It may not be too late for some, but most are too proud to become expendable. If we don’t pour contempt on ourselves — God will!”

Fruitless Professors

In the 6th verse our Lord tells us again that all fruitless professors of religion shall perish in hell. — “*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” Soon, your refuge of lies will be swept away and you will perish without hope (Isaiah 28:14-20).

“Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only *to* understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it.*” (Isaiah 28:14-20)

Effectual Prayer

Then, in verse 7 our Lord assures us that because we are one with him, ever abiding in him, inseparable from him, our prayers are accepted before God and effectual with God. — *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”*

Abiding or living in Christ is expressed here simply as *“my words abide in you.”* His word is called *“the word of life”* (Philippians 2:16; Hebrews 4:12; John 6:63). It is the Seed of life (1 Peter 1:23-25; Luke 8:11-15). You cannot separate the incarnate Word and the written Word. It is impossible for a man to abide in Christ who knows not, loves not, and obeys not his Word.

Then, the Lord Jesus says, *“Ye shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.”* This must not be understood of temporal things, such as riches, honors, material wealth, and earthly luxuries. Prayer is not putting covetousness in pretty words. The person who abides in Christ, in whom his word abides, desires and seeks the will of God, and the glory of God, and prays accordingly (Matthew 6:9-13; 7:7-11; Romans 8:26; Philippians 4:19; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

God Glorified

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” — What do you want more than anything else? Is it or is it not the glory of God? Unless I am totally deceived by Satan, I want the glory of my God more than anything in this world. Nothing in the world could give me such fulness of joy as the certain knowledge that by some means or another, I have done something by which I have glorified God. O wonder of wonders! O matchless, wondrous, unfathomable grace! Here our Savior assures every sinner who trusts him, he assures every branch in the Vine that our God is and shall be forever glorified in us!

He chose us that we might bring forth much fruit, and that our fruit might remain (v. 16). He redeemed us, regenerated us, and called us that we might be the firstfruits unto God (Romans 8:23; James 1:18; Revelation 14:4). He has given us his Spirit of Life, by whom we bear fruit unto our God (Galatians 5:22-23). The Lord God sees to it that we bring forth fruit, as our great Husbandman. And he is glorified in us by that which he works in us by his grace (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10).

Just in case you do not know what to call that, let me tell you. That is called *“Grace! Free, sovereign, omnipotent, effectual, saving grace!”* May the God of all grace make his grace yours!

Chapter 100
“So have I Loved You”

“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.” (John 15:9)

I can think of nothing more miserable on this earth than living with the thought, with the firm persuasion, that no one loves you, or even cares about you. But I can think of nothing more joyful than the knowledge of Christ’s love for me. It is my soul’s delight to contemplate it. Think of it. — “*The Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me!*” Truly...

“I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus, the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean!”

“O love surpassing knowledge,
O grace so full and free!
I know that Jesus loves me
And that’s enough for me!

O wonderful salvation
From sin Christ set me free
I feel the sweet assurance
And that’s enough for me!

O blood of Christ so precious
Poured out at Calvary
I feel its cleansing power
And that’s enough for me!”

Meditate for a while on the great, immeasurable, incomprehensible love of Christ for our souls, as he declares it in John 15:9. — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*” Here are deep green pastures, in which the Great Shepherd makes his sheep lie down, in which we find rest for our souls. Here are still waters beside which he graciously leads us to refresh our spirits. Here are paths of righteousness, in which our Lord graciously causes us to walk. Here is the table he prepares for us in the presence of our enemies. — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*”

What sweet rest I have found in this blessed assurance of his love. — “*As the Father hath loved me,*” the Son of God says to this poor sinner, “*so have I loved you.*”

The love of Christ is the great cause of our redemption and salvation. It is, as C. H. Spurgeon put it, “as the sun in the midst of the heavens of grace.” May God the Holy Spirit enable us to plunge into these deep waters, and drink, and drink, and drink, until our souls are satiated and overflowing. — “*As the Father hath loved me so have I loved you.*” I want to know, and I want you to know “*the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God*” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

There is such depth and mystery in the love of Christ that it simply cannot be comprehended, much less explained. All we can do is taste it, experience it, believe it, and rejoice in it. Oh, that we may experience it more fully! Blessed Savior, bring us into your banqueting house; let us see the banner of your love and rejoice, as we drink from this blessed fountain. — “*Thy love is better than wine!*” Come, O Holy Spirit, come! Take the

things of Christ and show them to us by your grace. Show us, now, our Savior's love!

I want you to see and be assured of this one thing: — Every sinner who trusts Christ is loved by him, even as he is loved by God the Father! — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”*

Believe It

The first thing I would say to you about the love of Christ is this: — “Believe it!” Oh, may God enable us to believe it. May he give us grace and faith to believe it unquestioningly. If we trust the Son of God as our Savior, we have every reason to believe that which he here declares to us. — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”*

He loves us personally, and loves us infinitely! Others like to talk about his love as a general, meaningless love of benevolence toward all men. But our Savior here speaks to his own, and says, — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”* He here assures us of his peculiar, distinct, and distinguishing love for his own elect, to whom he says in verse 16, — *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”*

If we are in him, as the branches are in the vine, we are the objects of the Savior's peculiar love. He speaks to us as his church, as his choice bride, and to each one personally, and says, — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”*

Does the Son of God speak thus to you? Are those words addressed to me? Have we taken hold of Christ by faith? Has he saved us by his grace? Do we draw life from him? Is he our hope, our joy, our all? If he is, these words are spoken to us. With his own lips, and here in his Word, our Savior takes us into his arms and whispers in our ears, as a man does the wife he adores, *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”*

That he truly loves us, we may confidently believe. Though we might and do rightfully conclude that he loves us, when we begin to see what he has done for us, our Savior does not leave it as a matter to be inferred. No. He speaks the words. — *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”* Let me never doubt his words. They were spoken in the solemn night of his agony, and are recorded here in the Book of God.

The Parallel

As if to confirm his love to us and seal it to our hearts, that we may be absolutely assured of it and know something of its indescribable greatness, our Savior draws a parallel to his love. He does not say “I love you as a man love a woman.” He does not say “I love you as a mother loves her child.” He says, *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”* Would you dare doubt the love of the Father to his Son? I know you would not do so. The Father's love for his Son is one of those unquestionable things we can never dream of questioning.

Our blessed Savior would have us place his love for us in the same category with the Father's love for him. He would have us be just as confident of the one as of the other. How does the Father love the Son?

God the Father loves his darling Son as one with himself. The Father and the Son are, with the Holy Spirit, one God, one in an eternal, essential, indestructible union. As such, the Father loves the Son with a boundless, immeasurable love. The Lord Jesus loves us just that way, as one with himself, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, boundlessly and immeasurably! That is exactly how the Holy Spirit describes his love for us in Ephesians 5:23-32. Think about that, and be assured of your Savior's love! — Loving you, the Son of God loves his own body!

Because of his love for Christ, the Father chose him as his Servant. — *“Behold, my servant, whom I*

uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isaiah 42:1). So it is that our Savior loves us, with an everlasting, eternal love. Because he loved us, he chose us to be his own. Do you remember how he puts it in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy?

"For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

He loved you because he loved you! Divine election flows from the fountain of God's everlasting love. It was in love that he predestinated us unto eternal life and accepted us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:3-6).

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

O my brother, my sister, hear this and rejoice. — The Son of God loved you before the world began, just because he would love you! He loved you in order that he might manifest his love to you. He loved you in order that you might be conformed unto his image, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, and that you might forever be one with him in his glory, heir of God and joint-heir with himself!

The Father loves the Son because he is his Son. So Christ loves us (1 John 3:1). The Father loves the Son because of his perfect obedience unto death, because of the righteousness he brought in and the satisfaction he has made (John 10:16-18; Philippians 2:5-11). So Christ loves us. The Father loves the Son as the rightful heir of all things (John 3:35). So the Son loves us (Romans 8:17-18). The Father loves the Son and shows him all things (John 5:20). So the Son loves us (John 15:15). The Father loves the Son because he is glorified in him (John 17:4-5). So the Son of God loves us (Ephesians 2:7).

The Father loves his Son as one who is worthy of his love, as one in whom his soul delights; and our Lord Jesus loves us as a people worthy of his love, made worthy by his love, as a people in whom his soul delights (Colossians 1:12; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Because of His Love

Because of his great love, having chosen us in love, so great was the love of our Lord that he became a Man, became one with us, that we might be one with him. He, who "*counted it not robbery to be equal with God,*" became a Man that he might execute his eternal purposes of love toward us. It is written, "*For this cause shall a man leave his father and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.*"

That is what Christ did for us. He left his Father that he might become one flesh with his chosen bride. He took our nature so that he might be able to do for us and suffer for us what, otherwise, he could not have done and suffered. By taking upon himself our nature, the Lord of Glory established a nearer and sweeter union with his beloved bride than could otherwise have existed. If he had never become the Babe of Bethlehem and the Man of Nazareth, how could he have been made in all points like unto his brethren? What love must that be that brought the Lord of Glory from the highest Heaven to become the Man of Sorrows for our sakes!

Having become a Man for us, the Lord Jesus died as our Substitute, in our room and stead, under the

fury of God's holy wrath and infinite justice, because of love. — *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13). The laying down of his life is the proof of his love. He died for us voluntarily, in all the pain, shame, and ignominy of sin, being made sin for us, forsaken of God and cursed, because he loved us. Behold how he loved us! Blessed Savior, let me never doubt your great love for me! He died, *“the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.”*

It was because of his great love for us that the Son of God gave us life by the power of his grace. Read Ezekiel 16 again. There you will see the condition we were in when he came to us in *“the time of love.”* We were deserted, cast out, filthy, dead, without one to pity us. There we were, lost, helpless, ruined, dead, and no one cared. — Oh, but he cared! Our Savior came to us and drew us by effectual, irresistible love to himself (Jeremiah 31:3; Ezekiel 16:1-14).

Because of his great love for us, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's darling Son, has forgiven us, blotting out all our iniquities. He has justified us and sanctified us; and he has kept and keeps us in his love!

As I look back upon my own life, I am filled with adoring gratitude and thanksgiving. Surely, goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life! When all the days of my life are threaded on time's string, what a bracelet of mercies they make! What shall I say of my Lord's love? If I liken it for height to the mountains, I see Alps piled on Alps. — *“Your mercy, O God, is in the heavens.”* If I compare it to depth the sea, I am again lost in wonder. I can only cry, — *“O the depth!”* Let us not doubt his great love. He has proved it beyond sufficiency. Has he not? Let us, then, be ravished with his love!

Because of his love for us, our Savior has made us one with himself. Who can describe this union of love and grace? It is inexpressible. We are married to him, joined to him, cemented to him, grafted in him, built upon him, members of his body, one with him in a living, loving, lasting union! He has made us to be identical with himself! I can hear some screaming when they read that, — *“He has made us to be identical with himself!”* *“You just can't say that. People will carry it too far! You've got to explain that. You've got to qualify it. People will carry it too far!”* — I reply, go ahead and try. Try to carry that too far! — He has made us to be identical with himself!

“Twixt Jesus and the chosen race
Subsists a bond of sovereign grace,
That hell, with its infernal train,
Shall ne'er dissolve nor rend in vain

Hail! sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!

One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.

This sacred tie forbids their fears,
For all He is or has is theirs;
With Him, their Head, they stand or fall,
Their life, their surety, and their all.”

The righteousness of our Surety is our righteousness! His obedience is our obedience! His death is our

death! His life is our life! His future is our future! His glory is our glory!

This is love, indeed! Our Savior says, “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you!*” — “*Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?*” This eternal oneness is the security both of grace and glory to our souls. The saints of God around the throne are not more fully loved than we are; and they have no stronger reason to be assured of our Savior’s love than we do.

What more can I say? What more can he say? — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you!*” Personally! Freely! Eternally! Intimately! Immutably! Without beginning! Without end! Without change! Completely! With complete complacency, satisfaction, and delight! Faithfully! Immeasurably! Amazingly!

Continue In

Our Savior says to you and me, “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*” I take that to mean, “Ever abide in the confident awareness of my love, never doubt it, never call it into question.” I know that is what this means, because he says as much in verses 10-16.

Continue in the Savior’s love, and you will find his love to be a balm for all your woes, a consolation in all your sorrows, strength for your journey, a fire to melt you, make you tender, and inspire you, and a delight to rejoice your heart.

This, truly, is perfect love! And the assurance of our Savior’s perfect love for us takes away all fear (1 John 4:15-19). Therefore, our Savior says, “*Continue ye in my love,*” ever abide in the confident awareness of my love, never doubt it, never call it into question. — “*Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 21). Child of God, sinner washed in the Savior’s blood and saved by his grace, walk in this light all the days of your life. — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*”

Chapter 101 “No Greater Love”

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

The whole purpose of our Savior in this chapter is to assure believing sinners of his great love. Every word, every phrase, every illustration is intended to assure us of his love, that we may continually live in the confidence of his love. He begins the chapter by telling us that he is the true Vine and we are the branches, assuring us of our union with him. Then, he tells us that the One who takes care of the vineyard of grace is God, his Father and our Father, saying, “*My Father is the Husbandman.*” In verse 9 our Savior assures us of his great love for us, with these sweet words: — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.*” His next word is “*Continue ye in my love.*” That is to say, “Now, go on living in the confident assurance of my love, ever trusting me.” Then, our dear Savior says, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”

There is truly no greater love than the love of our blessed Savior for us! Because of his great love for us, without any compulsion, except the compulsion of his love, the Son of God freely laid down his life for us!

He not only came down from heaven and laid aside his glory and royal majesty, but he laid down his life for us. Nothing is dearer to a man than his life. That is his all. He who gives his life gives everything. But our Lord’s life was not the common life of a common man. His was the life of a man who is himself God. It was the Lord of glory, the Prince of life, who was crucified and slain in our place upon the cursed tree.

Voluntary Sacrifice

His life was not taken from him. He laid down his life, and freely gave his life for us, in our room and stead, as a ransom for us, because he loved us. The Lord of Glory laid down his life for us who were his enemies, because he had from eternity called us his friends, and was determined to make us his friends. He laid down his life; the Son of God voluntarily died for us, because of his great love for us, a people who deserved to die, a people who hated him and wished that he should be made to die, a people from whom he would get no love in return, except he create it.

Being our Surety and Substitute, standing in our place, he took our sins to be his own, and was made sin for us. Bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, our Lord Jesus bore the curse of the law, sustained his Father’s wrath, and all the punishment due to our sin. He willingly suffered the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

This he did for us when we were sinners, without strength, his implacable enemies, and enmity itself to him. And by the blood of his cross, he has reconciled us unto himself, because he chose us for his friends. He pitched his heart upon us from eternity and resolved to make us his friends. And now, by the regenerating grace and saving power of his Spirit, he has made us his friends forever.

Greater Love

Here, our blessed Savior tells us that his love, which caused him to lay down his life for us, is greater than any love known to man. The Son of God, our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ, laid down his life for his enemies, without any selfish motive, freely and voluntarily. Men may and do die for men, but only because they cannot avoid it, or because they look upon the one for whom they die as being worthy of their sacrifice, or even because they desire the praise and applause of others as being great, self-sacrificing heroes. But our Lord’s sacrificial obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, was the free, voluntary sacrifice of our loving and lovely Surety and Substitute (Romans 5:6-8).

Willing Bondslave

We have a clear, instructive picture of our Lord's obedience unto death as our Substitute in Exodus 21:1-6.

“Now these *are* the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.”

That is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did for us in the covenant of grace. Christ became Jehovah's voluntary Servant that he might redeem and save his people by his free obedience to God as our Substitute. This is what our blessed Savior says of himself, as he describes himself in Isaiah 50:5-7, and as he describes his work in John 10:16-18.

(Isaiah 50:5-7) “The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

(John 10:16-18) “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. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Nothing to You

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most wonderful, astounding, magnificent event in the history of the universe. Nothing that is, has been, or shall hereafter be can be compared to it. Yet, as he was suffering the wrath of God, bearing the sins of his people, dying as the voluntary Substitute for guilty, hell-deserving, hell-bent sinners such as we are, we hear the Son of God expressing the most woeful, unexplainable lamentation imaginable (Lamentations 1:12-14).

“*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger. From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate [and] faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, [and] come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into [their] hands, [from whom] I am not able to rise up.”

When I hear those words falling from the lips of the Son of God, as he hangs upon the cursed tree, I simply cannot avoid asking a question. Of whom does the bleeding Lamb of God speak these words? To whom is the death of Christ meaningless and insignificant?

Nothing in all the universe is more wonderful and magnificent in the eyes of God than the death of his dear Son. The Savior himself declares, “*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life!*” The

angels of heaven ever look into the mystery and wonder of redemption by the blood of Christ with astonishment. God's servants, faithful gospel preachers, are so overwhelmed with the wonders of redemption and the glory of the Redeemer that they never cease to study, glory in, and preach the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 6:1-7; Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 2:2). Redeemed sinners on the earth cherish nothing, delight in nothing, marvel at nothing like we do the death of our Lord Jesus Christ for us (Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16; 4:10). The ransomed in glory appear to think of nothing and speak of nothing except the dying love of the Lamb in the midst of the throne (Revelation 5:9-12). Hell itself looks upon the death of Christ as a wonderful, unexplainable, mysterious thing. I am certain that this is one thing that Satan himself did not understand: — that Christ would triumph over him and crush his head by his death upon the cross! Else he would never have put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Master.

Yet, there are some to whom our darling Savior speaks, as it were with astonishment, to whom his death is meaningless, insignificant, nothing. — *“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.”* Who are these people to whom the death of Christ is nothing? Who is it that thinks little of the sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Our Lord is here addressing himself to everyone who passes by him, passes by his sacrifice, passes by his death as the sinners' Substitute.

O unbelieving, Christless soul, it is you! O cold, calculating, heartless preacher, you who pass by the crucified Christ and take to your lips meaningless, insignificant things, it is you! Every sermon ought to be prepared and preached as if the preacher knew that all who hear him are on the brink of eternity. Any sermon that does not have Christ crucified for its beginning, its middle, and its end is a mistake in its conception and a crime in its execution. Christ crucified is mundane, meaningless, and insignificant only to unregenerate, unbelieving souls.

It is my heart's prayer that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ will be made the most important thing in all the world to you. I pray that you and I may become so totally consumed with the crucified Christ, that our hearts, our lives, every fiber of our souls may be constantly dominated by the death of Christ as our sin-atonement Savior.

Our Lord Jesus Christ declares plainly that his death at Calvary was the free, voluntary act of his own obedience to his Father's will, by which he won his Father's love as a man, as our Mediator and Surety (John 10:17-18). Surely, such a sacrifice of love ought to win our love to him!

The Father's Command

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of himself (in John 10) not as the eternal Son of God, but as the Good Shepherd, the Mediator, the Surety of his people. He says, *“This commandment have I received of my Father.”* With those words he declares that his death as our Substitute was arranged by God before the world began (Psalm 40:7; Hebrews 10:7-10). The death of Christ was not accomplished by the arrangement of men, or by the arrangement of hell, but by the eternal arrangement of the Triune God (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The death of Christ at Calvary was accomplished by the arrangement of an eternal covenant, the arrangement of sovereign providence, and the arrangement of infinite love (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:9-10).

Christ's Obedience

The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life voluntarily, as an act of free obedience to his Father. No man forced him to die. God the Father did not compel him to die, or take his life from him. Oh, No! Our Savior died voluntarily, by his own will. He said, *“I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father”* (John 10:17-18).

Our Redeemer's death was accomplished by his own will. — *"He poured out his soul unto death!"* It is true that *"it pleased the Father to bruise him."* The Father cried, *"Awake, O sword, against One that is my fellow. Smite and slay the Shepherd!"* But Christ took the cup of wrath in his own hands. The Son of God fell willingly upon the sword of justice. Our Savior died by his own will! Our blessed Christ laid down his life as the Substitute for chosen sinners for the satisfaction of justice and the glory of God, because of his great love for us. He laid down his life that he might take it again for the everlasting salvation of his elect (John 17:1-2; Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:5-11).

The Father's Love for His Son

Look back at John 10 again. Our Savior says, *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life."* I know of nothing in heaven or earth so sweet to meditate upon and so impossible to describe as the Father's love for his darling, dying Son. Hear it again. — *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life."* The Father loved him for the loveliness of his Godhead. The Father loved him for the beauty of his holy humanity. The Father loved him because he laid down his life for us. The Father loved him as the glorious, effectual, saving Mediator of his people.

God himself never saw anything in all the world so lovely, so infinitely worthy of his love, admiration, and honor, as the death of his dear Son upon the cursed tree for his people. — *"Herein is love!"*

"Much we talk of Jesus' blood;
But how little's understood!
Of His sufferings, so intense,
Angels have no perfect sense!

Who can rightly comprehend
Their beginning, or their end?
'Tis to God, and God alone,
That their weight is fully known.

See the suffering Son of God
Panting, groaning, sweating blood! —
Boundless depths of love divine!
Jesus, what a love was Thine!

Though the wonders Thou hast done
Are as yet so little known
Here we fix, and comfort take:
Jesus died for sinners' sake!"

— *Joseph Hart*

Because of this great act of love, because of this great act of Christ's free obedience to the Father as our Surety, the Father has given his Son everything (Isaiah 53:4-12; John 3:35; 17:2).

Let us learn from these words of our Lord and Savior that though God's child may suffer greatly in this world, often carrying a heavy cross and having the Father's face hidden from him, yet he is still the darling object of his Father's love. — Never did the Father more fully love his Son than when he was heaping upon him the fury of his wrath!

God honors those who honor his Son. — The only way a sinner can honor the Son of God is to trust him. He is the only way of access to God, and our only worthiness of the Father's love and approval (John 17:22-26). Yet, God, the Triune Jehovah, loves us! O how he loves us! God the Father gave his Son to die for us. God the Son laid down his life for us. God the Spirit now sprinkles us with the blood of Christ and declares us redeemed ((1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

If our Savior so loved us, how we ought to love him! — “*We love him because he first loved us*” (Psalm 116:1-19). If our Savior so loved us, how we ought to love one another (1 John 3:16-17). — “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends!*”

Chapter 101 “No Greater Love”

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

The whole purpose of our Savior in this chapter is to assure believing sinners of his great love. Every word, every phrase, every illustration is intended to assure us of his love, that we may continually live in the confidence of his love. He begins the chapter by telling us that he is the true Vine and we are the branches, assuring us of our union with him. Then, he tells us that the One who takes care of the vineyard of grace is God, his Father and our Father, saying, “*My Father is the Husbandman.*” In verse 9 our Savior assures us of his great love for us, with these sweet words: — “*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.*” His next word is “*Continue ye in my love.*” That is to say, “Now, go on living in the confident assurance of my love, ever trusting me.” Then, our dear Savior says, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”

There is truly no greater love than the love of our blessed Savior for us! Because of his great love for us, without any compulsion, except the compulsion of his love, the Son of God freely laid down his life for us!

He not only came down from heaven and laid aside his glory and royal majesty, but he laid down his life for us. Nothing is dearer to a man than his life. That is his all. He who gives his life gives everything. But our Lord’s life was not the common life of a common man. His was the life of a man who is himself God. It was the Lord of glory, the Prince of life, who was crucified and slain in our place upon the cursed tree.

Voluntary Sacrifice

His life was not taken from him. He laid down his life, and freely gave his life for us, in our room and stead, as a ransom for us, because he loved us. The Lord of Glory laid down his life for us who were his enemies, because he had from eternity called us his friends, and was determined to make us his friends. He laid down his life; the Son of God voluntarily died for us, because of his great love for us, a people who deserved to die, a people who hated him and wished that he should be made to die, a people from whom he would get no love in return, except he create it.

Being our Surety and Substitute, standing in our place, he took our sins to be his own, and was made sin for us. Bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, our Lord Jesus bore the curse of the law, sustained his Father’s wrath, and all the punishment due to our sin. He willingly suffered the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

This he did for us when we were sinners, without strength, his implacable enemies, and enmity itself to him. And by the blood of his cross, he has reconciled us unto himself, because he chose us for his friends. He pitched his heart upon us from eternity and resolved to make us his friends. And now, by the regenerating grace and saving power of his Spirit, he has made us his friends forever.

Greater Love

Here, our blessed Savior tells us that his love, which caused him to lay down his life for us, is greater than any love known to man. The Son of God, our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ, laid down his life for his enemies, without any selfish motive, freely and voluntarily. Men may and do die for men, but only because they cannot avoid it, or because they look upon the one for whom they die as being worthy of their sacrifice, or even because they desire the praise and applause of others as being great, self-sacrificing heroes. But our Lord’s sacrificial obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, was the free, voluntary sacrifice of our loving and lovely Surety and Substitute (Romans 5:6-8).

Willing Bondslave

We have a clear, instructive picture of our Lord's obedience unto death as our Substitute in Exodus 21:1-6.

“Now these *are* the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.”

That is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did for us in the covenant of grace. Christ became Jehovah's voluntary Servant that he might redeem and save his people by his free obedience to God as our Substitute. This is what our blessed Savior says of himself, as he describes himself in Isaiah 50:5-7, and as he describes his work in John 10:16-18.

(Isaiah 50:5-7) “The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

(John 10:16-18) “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. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

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Because of this great act of love, because of this great act of Christ's free obedience to the Father as our Surety, the Father has given his Son everything (Isaiah 53:4-12; John 3:35; 17:2).

Let us learn from these words of our Lord and Savior that though God's child may suffer greatly in this world, often carrying a heavy cross and having the Father's face hidden from him, yet he is still the darling object of his Father's love. — Never did the Father more fully love his Son than when he was heaping upon him the fury of his wrath!

God honors those who honor his Son. — The only way a sinner can honor the Son of God is to trust him. He is the only way of access to God, and our only worthiness of the Father's love and approval (John 17:22-26). Yet, God, the Triune Jehovah, loves us! O how he loves us! God the Father gave his Son to die for us. God the Son laid down his life for us. God the Spirit now sprinkles us with the blood of Christ and declares us redeemed ((1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

If our Savior so loved us, how we ought to love him! — “*We love him because he first loved us*” (Psalm 116:1-19). If our Savior so loved us, how we ought to love one another (1 John 3:16-17). — “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends!*”

Chapter 102 Electing Love

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16)

Did you know that the Bible talks about a special, distinct group of people called “the chosen”? These chosen ones are God’s elect, the people he has chosen unto salvation. They were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, because they are the chosen. They must and shall be regenerated, called, and saved, because they are the chosen. They shall be preserved unto everlasting glory; they cannot perish, because they are the chosen. They cannot be lost, because they are the chosen. They cannot be condemned, because they are the chosen. The chosen are uniquely special to God, because they are the chosen.

Do you rejoice in that? Do you rejoice in electing love? Paul did. He said, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*” (Ephesians 1:3-4). — “*We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Do you rejoice in electing love? Peter did. He said, “*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 marvellous light...Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*” (1 Peter 2:9; 1:2).

Do you rejoice in electing love? David did. He leaped and danced before the ark of God, because God had chosen him above Saul. He said, “*Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all desire*” (2 Samuel 23:5).

Do you rejoice in electing love? Our Lord Jesus did. He 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 it seemed good in thy sight*” (Matthew 11:25-26). Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ taught the doctrine of divine election plainly and clearly. He rejoiced in it and gave thanks for it.

On the night before his crucifixion, in order to comfort, encourage, and strengthen his disciples, he told them about his marvelous electing love in these words: — “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of my Father in my name, he may give it you*” (John 15:16).

Do you rejoice in electing love? Surely, every true believer should be filled with joy and praise toward God when he hears the good news of God’s electing love in Christ. Indeed, every believer, as he reads the Word of God and is taught of God the Holy Spirit, understanding the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ, does rejoice in electing love: — God’s eternal choice and election of his people in Christ unto salvation and eternal life.

Election is the source and fountain of all the blessings of grace. All the blessings of divine mercy flow down to needy sinners from the throne of God, through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, “*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*”

Do you rejoice in electing love? I hope that you have learned to do so. I hope that your heart is as full of joy at the thought of divine election as David’s was. When he thought about God’s eternal, electing love, he sang, — “*Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple*” (Psalm 65:4).

As for me, I do rejoice in electing love. I most gladly acknowledge God's election.

'Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For Lord that could not be,
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But Thou hast chosen me.
Thou, from the sin that stained me,
Washed and set me free,
And to this end ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

'Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind.
My heart owns none before Thee,
For Thy rich grace I thirst,
This knowing, if I love Thee –
Thou must have loved me first!

Thank God for his free, sovereign, eternal, electing love in Christ!

Context

In John 15:9 our Savior assures us of his infinite, eternal love for us. He says, "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.*" Then he says, "*continue ye in my love.*" That is to say, "Now, go on living in the confident assurance of my love, ever trusting me." Our ever blessed Savior tells us in verse 11 that he spoke these sweet words of grace to us, that his joy might remain in us and that our joy might be full. Then, in verses 13-15, he tells us some things that ought to, sure enough, make our joy full.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Then, in verse 16, our Lord Jesus tells us the source, the fountain, the cause of all these blessed works of his marvellous, free grace. He laid down his life for us; he has made us his friends; he makes all things known to us and bestows all grace upon us, because of his free, electing love.

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

This is what I want you to see clearly from our text and from the Scriptures as a whole. This is the doctrine taught throughout the Book of God. — Our Savior's choice and election of his people is not the result of something we do, have done, or might do, but the cause of everything he does, has done, and will yet do for us.

Psalm 65:4

That is exactly what we are told in Psalm 65:4.

“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple.”

Here election is spoken of as being in the present tense, though it was done before the world began, because this great work of grace is known and experienced in time. No one knows his election until he has been effectually called by the Holy Spirit to life and faith in Christ.

Notice the progression of grace running through this verse of Scripture. “*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest.*” — That is election. God chose to save some in eternity; and those whom he chose to save in eternity he graciously cuts out from the rest of mankind in time, like a rancher cutting his cattle out of the many roaming the open range. They were his cattle before. He simply rounds them up at the appointed time.

“*And causest to approach unto thee.*” — That refers to irresistible, saving grace, the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit. Election both precedes and is the source and cause of this call.

“*That he may dwell in thy courts.*” — Sinners chosen and called by grace are caused to dwell, not to visit, but to dwell in the courts of divine worship. Those who are chosen and called by the grace of God to life and faith in Christ are kept and preserved by that same grace unto eternal glory. We shall forever abide in our Savior’s love, because he declares, “*I have chosen you.*”

But there is more. Election is the source and cause of the everlasting happiness and satisfaction of God’s saints in heaven. — “*We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.*” The house and temple of God in the Old Testament were typical of and representations of Christ and heaven, of God’s salvation, and our everlasting nearness to and worship of him. This is true blessedness; and this blessedness rises from and is effectually caused by God’s election of his people unto salvation in Christ before the world began.

No wonder David sang, “*O the blessedness of the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee!*” No wonder God’s election was so much on his heart. It was the thought of God’s election that made him leap and dance before the ark of God (2 Samuel 6:21). And it was the fact of his election by God unto salvation and eternal life in Christ that sustained his heart and rejoiced his soul as he lay upon his deathbed. Indeed, this is a doctrine full of joy and comfort to every child of God.

I want you to look into the Word of God and see what God teaches us about this glorious gospel doctrine of election. I want you to see *seven things* revealed in this Book about God’s election.

Eternal Election

First, God chose some to salvation and eternal life in Christ before the world began. There are some who will tell you, “The Bible does not teach the doctrine of election.” Those who make such foolish statements either have never read the Scriptures, or have totally forgotten what they read, or they are out and out liars. Election is taught everywhere in the Book of God.

The Scriptures speak of “*elect angels,*” an “*elect nation,*” an “*elect lady,*” and “*elect churches.*” God chose some angels, and passed by others. Of the first two men born in the world, Cain and Abel, the Lord God chose one and passed by the other. He chose Noah and his family, and left the rest of the world to perish. He chose Abram, but no one else in his father’s house. He chose Jacob, but not his brother, Esau. God chose Israel, the smallest of all nations, to be the nation to whom he would reveal himself. All other nations were left in utter darkness. He chose Joseph, but not Pharaoh.

No one can, with any measure of integrity, teach that the Word of God does not teach the doctrine of election. That is too obvious to even discuss. However, the question of importance is this: — Does the Bible teach the election of some to salvation to the exclusion of others? Does the Word of God declare that God chose some, but not all of the sons and daughters of Adam to be the heirs of grace and glory in Christ? Indeed it does (Matthew 20:16; 22:14; Romans 9:11-18; 11:5-7).

There is absolutely no question about the fact that the Bible clearly and distinctly teaches the doctrine of election. God chose to save some and passed by others. So, really, the only question to be answered is — What does the Bible teach about election? *So, secondly, I want to show you that...*

God's Purpose

Second, the purpose of God in all things is the salvation of his elect (Romans 8:28-30). We recognize, of course, that the Word of God teaches the doctrine of God's glorious, sovereign predestination. Like election, it is a truth so plainly revealed in Holy Scripture that it simply cannot be denied by honest men. For that matter, I cannot imagine why anyone would want to deny it.

Predestination is the all-inclusive purpose of our great and glorious God in which he sovereignly determined all things that come to pass in time for the salvation of his elect. In other words, everything that has been, is now, and hereafter shall be was purposed by God in eternity and is brought to pass by God in time for the salvation of that great multitude whose names were inscribed in the Lamb's book of life in sovereign election before the world began. No one since the apostles ever stated the doctrine more beautifully than *Isaac Watts* did in his hymn...

“Keep silence all created things,
And wait your Maker's nod;
My soul stands trembling while she sings
The honors of her God.

Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown;
Hang on His firm decree;
He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be.

Chained to His throne a volume lies
With all the fates of men,
With every angel's form and size
Drawn by th' eternal pen.

His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke
Fulfills some bright design.

Here He exalts neglected worms
To scepters and a crown;
And then the following page He turns,
And treads the monarch down.

Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives;

Nor dares the favorite angel pry
Between the folded leaves.

My God, I would not long to see
My fate with curious eyes,
What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright scenes may rise.

In Thy fair book of life and grace
May I but find my name,
Recorded in some humble place
Beneath my Lord the Lamb!"

This is the Bible doctrine of predestination. I give it to you in the very language of Holy Scripture. — *"In love,"* God our Father *"predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:4, 5, 6, 11, 12).

God chose some to salvation; and the purpose of God in all things is the salvation of all the chosen, whom he loved with an everlasting love.

Purpose Performed

Third, I want you to see that the purpose of God shall be accomplished. All that God has purposed, God will perform. The Bible never talks about God purposing what he does not perform, trying to do what he does not do, willing that which he never actually brings to pass, or of him in any way trying to prevent anything that does come to pass. God almighty does not try. He does! He does not wish. He accomplishes! He does not plan. He purposed!

Men talk about God's plan, because men can do nothing but plan. God does not talk like that. God talks about his purpose. His purpose of grace is much more than some imaginary *plan of salvation*. A plan may be interrupted, hindered, altered, or utterly rejected. That is not God's purpose of grace. God's purpose is the eternal determination of his heart, the holy, eternal determination of his very Being, to save the people of his love, whom he chose to salvation before the world began.

That purpose cannot be frustrated, altered, or even hindered to any degree. Not even the rebellion of Lucifer or the fall of Adam hindered God's purpose of grace. Oh, no! Those events were just part of that which was and is necessary to accomplish God's sovereign purpose of grace according to election (Isaiah 14:24, 26-27; 46:9-11, 13; Romans 9:11).

In Christ

Fifth, election is in Christ (Ephesians 1:1-14). Everything God does for, gives to, and requires from sinners is in Christ. God does nothing for us, requires nothing from us, and gives nothing to us apart from Christ. I want you to see three things in this passage of Scripture concerning our election in Christ.

1st Election took place in eternity, before the worlds were made. God's love for us did not begin yesterday. It is from everlasting to everlasting. He chose us in Christ before time began. He inscribed our names in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.

2nd Our eternal election in Christ is the source and cause of all the other benefits and blessings of grace. Apart from election there are no blessings of grace here or of glory hereafter; but for the elect, all the blessings and blessedness of grace and glory are sure. Read verses three and four again. God's blessings of grace and glory flow to sinners "*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*" Adoption, acceptance with God, redemption and forgiveness, regeneration, preservation, resurrection, and the heavenly glory of the inheritance awaiting us, all are ours, all are sure to all the elect, according to the election of grace! All the chosen shall obtain all these things according to the purpose of God in election.

Do you see this? Everywhere people talk about the fact that Christ came into the world, but few have any idea who he is or why he came. Very few indeed realize that the cause of his coming here to live and die for sinners is to be found in God's electing love and his sovereign purpose of grace. The Son of God came here to save his people (the people chosen by and given to him by God the Father in eternal mercy) from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

“’Twas not to make Jehovah’s love
Towards the sinner flame,
That Jesus, from His throne above,
A suffering man became.

’Twas not the death which He endured,
Nor all the pangs He bore,
That God’s eternal love procured,
For God was love before.

He loved the world of His elect
With love surpassing thought;
Nor will His mercy e’er neglect
The souls so dearly bought!”

John Kent

3rd Election is for the glory of God. Here is the reason why God chose to save sinners, why he chose some unto eternal life, and why he saves us in a manner that clearly demonstrates both his supreme sovereignty and his glorious grace. It is, as Paul here declares three times, "*That we should be to the praise of his glory!*" — "*That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:7).

- God chose to save some.
- God's purpose of grace in all things is the salvation of his elect.
- God's sovereign purpose according to election shall stand.
- Election is an eternal work and benefit of God's grace in Christ.

Unto Salvation

Fifth, the Word of God teaches us plainly that God's election of sinners in Christ is unto salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:2). Without question the Bible teaches the eternal salvation of all God's elect. There is a sense in which all who are saved in time were saved from eternity. Romans 8:28-30, Ephesians 1:4-6, and 2nd Timothy 1:9-11 plainly and emphatically declare that all God's elect were in Christ, redeemed, accepted, justified, sanctified, and glorified from eternity by the purpose, and decree of God. But do not ever think of election as salvation. Election, by itself, is not salvation. Election, by itself, saves no one. Election is

unto salvation. Be sure you get the language of the Scriptures. Put 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 together with 1 Peter 1:2, and you will see these *seven things* about God's election.

1st Election is a cause for great thanksgiving and praise to God.

2nd Election is according to the *foreknowledge* of God, according to his everlasting love and sovereign foreordination. — The word *foreknowledge* in 1 Peter 1:2 is the exact same word translated *foreordain* in verse twenty.

3rd Election is a personal, distinguishing work of grace. — “*God hath from the beginning chosen you!*”

4th Election is unto salvation. — I realize that there is a sense in which some are elected to specific service in the kingdom of God from eternity. Not all are prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and deacons. Those who are, if they hold their offices in faithfulness, were chosen to their work by God. However, the biblical doctrine of election is not election to service, but election unto salvation.

5th We were chosen to be saved in a manner consistent with and honoring to the holiness, justice, and truth of God. — Peter tells us that we were chosen by God “*unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*” That is to say, No one, not even the elect, could ever be saved apart from the obedience and death of Christ by which redemption was accomplished. The sprinkling of his blood in 1 Peter 1:2 has a double significance. Both are necessary to the salvation of God's elect. It refers to the sprinkling of his blood in heaven, and to the sprinkling of his blood upon our hearts

6th We were chosen to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit. — In other words, no one can ever be saved who is not born again, regenerated, sanctified by God the Holy Spirit, election and predestination notwithstanding.

7th We were chosen to salvation through the belief of the truth. — Not only has God ordained who will be saved; he has also ordained the means by which they shall be saved; and the means he has ordained is the hearing of faith. Those who were chosen of God in eternity and redeemed by Christ at Calvary must and shall be regenerated and called by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Unconditional Election

Sixth, in 2 Timothy 1:9 we are taught that God's eternal choice of his people to salvation in Christ was an unconditional election of grace. God did not choose us and he does not save us because of our works. His choice of us was not based upon foreseen merit, or our foreseen choice of Christ, or our foreseen faith in him. Oh, no! Our only merit before God is Christ. Our choice of him is the result of his choosing us. Our faith in him is the fruit and result of his election.

“’Twas with an everlasting love
That God His own elect embraced,
Before He made the worlds above,
Or earth on her huge columns placed.

O love, how high thy glories swell,
How great, immutable, and free!
Ten thousand sins, as black as hell,
Are swallowed up, O love, in thee!

Loved when a wretch defiled with sin,
At war with heaven, in league with hell,
A slave to every lust obscene,
Who, living, lived but to rebel.

Believer, here thy comfort stands,
From first to last salvation's free;
And everlasting love demands
An everlasting song from thee."

John Kent

I hope each of you see and clearly understand these things regarding God's election.

- God chose some to be saved.
- God's purpose in all things is the salvation of his elect.
- The purpose of God according to election shall stand.
- Election is an eternal work of grace in Christ.
- Election is unto salvation.
- Election is unconditional.

Effectual Election

Seventh, God's electing grace is always effectual. That simply means it gets the job done. All who were chosen in eternity shall be called and saved in time, by the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit through the gospel because...

God "hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:" (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

We have no way of knowing until God makes it manifest, but perhaps the reason you have read this article is God's election. It may be that he has graciously and sovereignly caused you to do so that he might bring life and immortality to light in your soul through the gospel you have read.

Do you now find yourself trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your only, all-sufficient Lord and Savior? If you do, if you truly trust the Son of God, it is because "*God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation!*"

Let every child of God give praise honor, and glory to him forever for his free, electing love and favor, sovereignly and graciously bestowed upon us from eternity in Christ. He who chose us, redeemed us, called us, and gave us life and faith in Christ will keep us unto eternal glory by his grace.

Who shall condemn to endless flames
The chosen people of our God,
Since in the book of life our names
Are written in the Savior's blood?

Christ for the sins of His elect
Has full, complete atonement made;
And justice never can expect
That the same debt should twice be paid.

Neither the craft and power of hell,
According to God's faithful Word,
Nor all the sins that in us dwell,

Can separate us from our Lord.

Nothing in life, nothing in death,
No powers on earth, no powers above,
(Our God has sworn, the God of truth!)
Can change His purposes of love.

His sovereign mercy knows no end,
His faithfulness shall yet endure;
And those who on His Word depend
Shall find His Word forever sure!

How I thank God for his free, electing love! How sweet, how immeasurably sweet it is to hear my Savior say to me, as I look to him in faith, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you!*" Loved by Christ! — Redeemed by Christ! — Befriended by Christ! — Taught by Christ! — All because I was chosen by Christ before the worlds were made! — Now, his joy remains in me and my joy in him is full!

(Psalms 115:1) "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, *and* for thy truth's sake."

Chapter 103
“They Hated Me without a Cause”

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.” (John 15:22-25)

The hottest place of hell’s everlasting torment is reserved for sinners who hear but refuse to believe the gospel! Oh, what a dangerous thing it is for you to be raised under the faithful preaching of the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ! If you stop your ears, shut your eyes, harden your heart, and run madly to hell shoving God out of your way, the hottest place in hell shall be yours forever! If the gospel you hear does not lift you to the highest heaven, it will sink you into the lowest hell! It will be to you either that by which the Lord God gives you life everlasting in Christ, or that by which the God of Glory damns you forever. If you go to hell with the gospel of Christ ringing in your ears, it would be better for you never to have been born! Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to believe the gospel, for Christ sake! It is my heart’s desire and prayer to God for you that you might be saved by his wonderful grace!

The Son of God declares, “*If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.*” The sin our Lord speaks of here is the sin of Israel and the religious Jews in rejecting him, God’s Messiah, the One sent to them (Acts 3:25-26; John 1:11). If he had not come in his incarnation, in fulfilment of all their law and prophets, and with undeniable proof of his person, they would not be under such strong judgment for their particular sin; but he has come, and they have no excuse. Therefore, God has cast them off (Romans 11:7-10). In a word, it is every person’s responsibility to walk in the light God gives him. Our Savior is here telling us that those who have greater light, and refuse to walk in the light God gives them shall have greater condemnation. If God cast off the whole nation of Israel because they refused to bow to his Son, you can be certain he will cast you off (Proverbs 1:22-33; 29:1).

Next, the Lord Jesus tells us, “*He that hateth me hateth my Father also.*” Many pretend to know, love, and worship God, while rejecting and despising the Lord Jesus Christ. But our Savior tells us that all who hate him, the Christ of God, hate God who sent him. God the Father and God the Son are One (John 5:23; 10:30). The hatred of the world is toward the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and all who love the triune Jehovah.

In verse 24 we read, “*If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*” By his works, as well as by his words, his gospel, the Lord Jesus was evidently set forth before that generation as the Christ of God. Yet, they despised him. They are, therefore, without excuse. — Has the Lord Jesus Christ been evidently set before you? Has he made it clear to you that he is the Christ of God, the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world? Are those facts indisputably, irrefutably clear to you? If they are, your unbelief is inexcusable!

We see man’s sin everywhere. It is in our newspapers and on television every day. Murder, rape, incest, sodomy, adultery, pedophilia, terrorism: all these evils we look at with utter disgust, crying out for law and justice. But, if you want to see the evil of depraved humanity most fully, you will find it plainly set before you in John 15:25. — “*But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*”

When we think about the sin of our fallen race, we ought always to think of it in terms of deicide. Here is the essence of sin. It is the murder of God! Man, because of his hatred for his Creator, nailed the Son of God to a cross and threw a hellish party as they watched him die! That is the master crime of hell-bent humanity, the

pinnacle of man's guilt. Sin out did itself when it slew the Lord of glory, who came on earth to die in the place of fallen men. Never does sin appear so exceedingly sinful as when we see it nailing the Lamb of God to the cursed tree, whom it hated without a cause!

Most Hated

First, let me remind you that there has never been a man so hated as the God-man, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus here refers us to two verses in the Psalms (Psalms 35:19; 69:4), affirming plainly that the Psalms, though written by men from their own experiences, were written by divine inspiration as prophecies of our Savior.

From the time that he entered into this world, until the hour that he was hanged upon the cursed tree, the Son of God was the constant, unceasing object of man's cruel hatred. The word "*they*" refers to all who refused to believe our Savior. Though they had no reason to do so, they hated him.

No human being was ever so lovely as our Savior. It would seem almost impossible not to love him. Yet, lovely, loving, and loveable as he was, — "*Yea, he is altogether lovely!*" — no creature ever endured such a relentless hatred. As soon as he was born, Herod sought to kill him; and that was just the beginning. All the days of his life he was "*despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*"

Man's hatred for the Savior displayed itself in different ways. Sometimes it was in overt deeds, as when they took him to the brow of the hill, and would have cast him down headlong, or when they took up stones again to stone him, because he declared that he is God. At other times, the hatred showed itself in words of slander. — "*He is a drunken man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*" Sometimes it was manifest in looks of contempt, as when they looked suspiciously at him, because he ate with publicans and sinners, and sat down to eat with unwashed hands. At other times, the hatred was silent, entirely in their thoughts, as when they thought within themselves, "*This man blasphemeth,*" because he said to the woman taken in adultery, "*thy sins be forgiven thee.*"

But the hatred was always there. Even when they tried to make him their king, it was not because they loved him, or even admired him. It was because they thought they could use him for their own advantage, nothing more. Remember, it was the same men who tried to make him their king who, just a little while later cried, "*Crucify him, crucify him!*"

"*They*" who hated him were all men, in every rank and quarter of society. — The Rich and the Poor — The Men and the Women — The Old and the Young — The Pharisees and the Sadducees — The Governor and the Slave — The Learned and the Ignorant — The Powerful and the Powerless — The Prince and the Pauper!

Here was a man who walked among men, who loved men, who spoke to rich and poor as though they were (as indeed they are) on one level in his sight. Yet, all conspired against him in unified hatred. They admired his eloquence, and frequently would have fallen prostrate in worship before him, on account of the wondrous deeds he did. Yet, they all conspired together to put him to death, nailing him to the tree, wagging their heads, taunting him, jeering at him, mocking him, spitting in his face, jerking out his beard, beating him, and laughing at him, as if they were being entertained by a comedian!

No Reason

Anyone who bothers to read history, let alone the Word of God, knows that the Lord Jesus was the object of man's cruel hatred. But why did they hate him? They had no reason. Yet, three times we read, "*They hated me without a cause.*"

There is nothing that can be, or ever has been pointed to in the life of our Redeemer that was even objectionable, let alone a cause for hatred. Our Lord Jesus was perfect in his character. In his conduct, he was without flaw. His doctrine was pure and good. — The law of God he upheld, obeyed, and exemplified is, in the opinion of all sane men, good. — The doctrine he taught was pure doctrine. All his works were works of mercy. His kindness, sympathy, and tenderness were obvious to all. Yet, though there was no cause for it, the Lord of Glory was hated of all men in this world, and still is.

Enmity Against God

Third, the cause of man's hatred for Christ was and is altogether in himself. Here is the cause of man's hatred for Christ, "*the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*" (Romans 8:7-8). Men hated him without a cause, because they hate God who sent him, and everything about the Lord Jesus stirred man's hatred for God against him. They hated him, because of the gospel he preached. Their hatred of him was and is drawn forth and made manifest by the fact that...

- He declared himself to be God, one with the Father and equal to the Father (John 10:25-33).
- He exposed the evil of their hearts and the hypocrisy of their religion (Mark 7:20-23; Luke 16:15; John 8:40).
- He openly proclaimed God's sovereignty in the exercise of his mercy and grace (Luke 4:25-32).
- He preached redemption, righteousness, and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in him alone (John 6:37-40, 44-45, 47-51, 53, 61-65).
- They hated him, because he forgave sinners of their sins freely and fully, while refusing to accept and honor their works of righteousness.

For all these things they hated him. Yet, had they believed him, the gospel he preached would have saved them (Matthew 11:25-30).

By Divine Purpose

Fourth, all this was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, according to our God's sovereign, eternal purpose of grace toward us. — "*But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*" The hatred of men for Christ resulted in him being crucified upon the cursed tree as our Substitute (Acts 2:23, 36; Acts 4:27-28). By this means, by his sin-atonement death as our Substitute, the Lord Jesus declares, "*Then I restored that which I took not away*" (Psalm 69:4). Yet, the guilt rests on men, for they did what they wanted to do. Nothing in him gave them cause for this hatred. The evil was altogether in them. Be sure you understand this. — Wicked men are responsible for all the havoc they attempt to wreak upon the kingdom of God, and shall be judged accordingly; but let us never imagine that they have the power to accomplish their evil designs. — It is written, "*Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil...Jerusalem shall dwell safely*" (Proverbs 1:33; Jeremiah 23:6).

Freely Saved

Fifth, the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior is hated by men without a cause, and that is exactly how he saves sinful men and women who hate him — "*without a cause*" — "*freely*" (Hosea 14:4; Romans 3:19-24; 8:32).

A Question

Now, I have a question for you. — Do you hate him, or do you love him? I speak frankly to you, and tell you what the Word of God plainly declares. — If you refuse to trust him, if you refuse to bow to him and believe

him, your unbelief reveals your hatred for the Son of God (1 John 5:10). If you trust him, your faith in him causes you to love him. — *“Unto you, therefore, which believe, he is precious.”* — *“Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”*

“Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Behold my heart and see;
And turn each odious idol out,
That dares to rival Thee.

Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Then let me nothing love;
Dead be my heart to every joy,
When Jesus cannot move.

Is not Thy Name melodious still
To mine attentive ear?
Doth not each pulse with pleasure bound
My Savior’s voice to hear?

Hast Thou a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast Thou a foe, before whose face
I fear Thy cause to plead?

Would not mine ardent spirit vie
With angels round the throne,
To execute Thy sacred will,
And make Thy glory known?

Would not my heart pour forth its blood
In honor of Thy Name?
And challenge the cold hand of death
To damp th’ immortal flame?

Thou knowest I love Thee, dearest Lord,
But O, I long to soar
Far from the sphere of mortal joys,
And learn to love Thee more!”

Philip Doddridge

“We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). — Believing him, trusting him, loving him, I am confident that he loves me, even as he is loved by his Father, with an everlasting love. And his love for me casts out all fear.

Be Reconciled

May God the Holy Ghost now cause you, by his omnipotent mercy, to be reconciled to God, giving you life and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isaiah 55:1)

“Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” (Isaiah 55:3)

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7)

“Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” (2 Corinthians 5:10-11)

“Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

“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. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

“We then, [as] workers together [with him], beseech [you] also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now [is] the accepted time; behold, now [is] the day of salvation.)” (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

Quit fighting God. Be reconciled to God by faith in his darling Son, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Chapter 104 Equipped for Trouble

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended...These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:1-33)

Anyone who knows anything about public speaking knows that the most important parts of any public speech are the first thing and the last thing spoken. There are good reasons for this. If the speaker does not get your attention when he begins, he is not likely to get it at all. And people tend to remember the first thing a speaker says and the last thing he says.

The same thing applies to preaching. I had very few really good professors while I was in college. In Bible colleges and seminaries as in most colleges and universities, those who cannot do the work are hired to teach the courses. — But I did have a few very good professors. One of them was my Homiletics/Pastoral Theology professor (Dr. Billy Martin). He constantly stressed the need for careful study and preparation. He taught us that in sermon preparation preachers should always give as much attention to the sermon’s introduction and conclusion as to the main points of a message.

If you read sermons, especially those men wrote out for their own use, and never intended to have them published, the good ones, those from which people really benefit, almost always have three parts:

1. The Introduction
2. The Main Body: (Doctrinal Points and Exposition)
3. The Conclusion, or Application.

In the 16th chapter of John’s Gospel we have the conclusion of our blessed Savior’s last sermon just before he suffered and died as our Substitute at Calvary.

1. The sermon’s introduction in chapter 13 was a picture of redemption by the institution of the Lord’s Supper.
2. In chapters 14 and 15 the Savior’s doctrine is all grace.
 - He promises abiding, immutable grace to all who trust him (14:1-3).
 - He teaches and encourages us to trust him, assuring us of his goodness (14:4-14).
 - He promises to send the Holy Spirit to be our abiding, indwelling Comforter and Teacher (14:15-31).
 - The Lord Jesus then shows us the wonder of our union with him in chapter 15.
3. Then, when we come to chapter 16, we come to the conclusion of this great sermon. Here our Savior graciously applies all that he has said to our lives.

Expedient Departure

As we look at this 16th chapter of John’s Gospel the Savior himself applies the message to us. Our dear Redeemer here tells us that his departure out of this world by the sacrifice of himself upon the cursed tree was a matter of expediency for us. He said, “*It is expedient for you that I go away.*” As we read this chapter, it is obvious that the Lord’s attention was altogether on us? He said nothing about the joy that was before him in returning to his Father. There is not a word about the felicity to which he was going, as he returned to the Father’s house: nothing about the Father’s reception of his Son, his Servant, our Savior, nothing about the saints’ reception of their Redeemer, and nothing about the angels’ reception of their Lord! We hear of none of those things in the Lord’s farewell sermon.

Everything is about the Savior’s dear children he was about to leave behind in this world of trouble. As he was about to endure all the agonies of his sufferings and death as our Substitute, as he was about to

enter into his glory as our Mediator-King, our Savior's whole heart was on us and our needs in this world of woe. I find that fact wondrously amazing. — Don't you? In the hour of his greatest sorrow and in the anticipation of his greatest glory, our Savior's heart was on us (Psalm 69:1-7).

In this chapter, as our Savior concludes his last sermon before his crucifixion, he tells us the reason for all that he has taught from chapter 13 to this point. We see this in the very first verse of the chapter. — *“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended”* (John 16:1). All that he has been telling us, all that he has been teaching has been to prepare us for the trouble he knew we must face in this world of woe. He does so that we should not be offended (v. 1), that we might remember his doctrine (v. 4), and that we might have peace in him (v. 33).

Our Lord's intention here is that all who follow him, all who trust him, all who seek to live for him in this present evil world might be equipped for the trials, temptations, and troubles we must face in this world of woe. In these 33 verses of Inspiration our blessed Savior gives us seven promises, promises by which he would prepare and equip us for the troublesome times we must face in this world.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended” (v. 1). — How considerate our Savior is! We might presume that he would be angry with us if he suspected that we could be offended by anything that he did or suffered. We might presume that he would be angry if he suspected that the things we suffer for him might cause us to stumble; but our presumption would be wrong. — *“He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust!”* Our blessed Lord knows the weakness of our flesh; and he sympathizes with us in our deplorable weakness. How gracious he is! He prepares us ahead of time for the trouble that we might not be offended, might not stumble, and might not fall.

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you” (vv. 2-4). — As long as the disciples enjoyed the Savior's physical presence, he was like a wall of fire round about them. They did not sense any other need of protection from danger, as long as he showed himself in their midst, as long as he was manifestly aware of their danger.

Our Lord has not told us yet some of the things which he will reveal and do at the time appointed, because the trial has not come; but when the trial comes, he will give us grace sufficient for the hour.

“In every condition, — in sickness in health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth,
At home, or abroad, on the land, on the sea, —
As your days may demand so your succor shall be!”

If you are the Lord's, the Lord will supply you with the grace needed when it is needed. Do not torture yourself fretting about tomorrow and tomorrow's trouble. *“Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof;”* and sufficient is his grace for every day. He promises, *“My grace is sufficient for thee.”*

“But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart” (vv. 5-6). — The disciples were filled with sorrow because the Lord Jesus told them he was about to leave them; but none of them thought to ask “Why?” Had they known, had they understood ahead of time, that which he would make them look back upon with joy unspeakable, they would have rejoiced in the prospect as much as they did in the remembrance. What a lesson for us! — Blessed Holy Spirit, give me faith to trust my God for tomorrow as well as for yesterday. If we would but trust him implicitly, we would rejoice in the Lord always.

“*Nevertheless*” (v. 7) — I’ve learned to love that word “*nevertheless*.” Read how it is used in the Book of God and you will find reason to rejoice and give thanks to God for his great goodness, mercy, love, and grace in Christ Jesus (Psalms 31:21-23; 73:22-23; 89:28-34; 106:43-45).

In the rest of this chapter our Lord Jesus gives us seven great promises. Here are seven things promised to every believer, things by which the Son of God equips his elect for life in this world of woe.

Blessed Comforter

First, the Lord Jesus promised to give his redeemed a blessed, Divine Comforter. Of course, you know that Comforter is God the Holy Ghost. Most everyone who even casually reads the Bible knows that; but very few understand or appreciate that by which he the Holy Spirit comforts God’s elect. Yet, our Savior plainly tells us that the comfort by which he comforts the redeemed is the revelation of God’s grace in Christ.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (vv. 7-11).

The comfort of the Spirit is that sweet work of his grace in us, creating faith in Christ, by which he seals to us all the blessings of the covenant (Galatians 3:13-14; 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:12-14).

Spiritual Discernment

Second, the Lord Jesus promised that he would grant every saved sinner spiritual knowledge, discernment, and understanding.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you” (vv. 12-15).

This is the Spirit that “*searcheth all things*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9-10). John tells us that if we have Christ, we have the unction of the Spirit and know all things, for the anointing teaches you all things (1 John 2:20-27). Paul tells us that we have the mind of Christ and know all things (1 Corinthians 2:12-16). — We should expect God the Holy Spirit to do his work in us just as effectively as Christ has done his work for us.

Hear the Savior’s promise and rejoice. In this world of religious confusion and chaos the Spirit of Truth guides believing sinners into all truth. He shows us, by his Word, that which the Lord Jesus actually accomplished at Calvary. — “*He will show you things to come*” (v. 13). He glorifies Christ and shows us the things of Christ (vv. 14-5).

Sweet Reunion

In verses 16-22 the Savior promised his sorrowing disciples that shortly after his departure they should look forward to a sweet reunion with him.

“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the

Father... Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy... And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

The sight of our Savior and of our blessed union with him makes our hearts rejoice. We see him as our successful Substitute, our unrivalled Sovereign, and our coming King. This was literally fulfilled when he rose from the dead. — "*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord*" (John 20:20). But there is a wider, complete fulfilment of this promise awaiting his suffering, sorrowing disciples in these latter days. He has promised, "*I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*" (John 14:3).

Effectual Prayer

The fourth promise is found in verses 23-24. Our Savior equips us for the trials and heartaches, the temptations and troubles we must endure in this world by promising that our hearts' prayers shall never fall on deaf ears in heaven, by promising us that our prayers to our God are effectual prayers.

"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give [it] you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Our Lord made this promise three times in this one message (John 14:13; 15:16, 16:23). I presume he intends for us to understand that our God will never ignore the cries of our hearts, that our God will give us our hearts' desire, that our joy may be full. — "*Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He will give you; ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full.*" — "*Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it*" (Psalm 81:10).

What is it, my brother, my sister, that you want from God? — Uninterrupted communion with Christ? — Complete consecration to Christ? — Perfect conformity to Christ? It shall be yours!

Blessed Advocacy (vv. 26-27)

Fifth, our Savior assures us of his blessed advocacy on our behalf as our Intercessor in heaven.

"At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (vv. 26-27).

Our Lord said, "*I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you,*" because there was no need. He had already promised this (John 14:16). Never forget this, child of God, — "*We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 2:1-2). What thanksgiving and confidence this should bring to our hearts! Christ is pleading for us with the Father who loves us. Nothing in heaven, earth, or hell can harm us or prevent his will being done in us, for us, and with us.

Peace

Sixth, the Savior promises peace, blessed, sweet, abiding peace. — "*These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace*" (v. 33). He has made peace by the blood of his cross. He has spoken peace by the grace and power of his Spirit. This peace is not of ourselves. It is not the result of something we do. It is not conditioned by our circumstances. It is not affected by our disappointments or tribulations. The world cannot give it nor take it away. Christ himself is our Peace. He is our Peace; and in him we have peace: peace with God, peace from God, and the peace of God, the peace of propitiation, the peace of pardon, the peace of

providence, and the peace of his presence! This peace is as real, as abiding, and as eternal as Christ himself. — *“In me ye shall have peace.”*

Certain Triumph

The *seventh* promise given by our Lord before he left his beloved disciples in the world of woe, the seventh promise by which he equips us for all that lies before us between here and eternity is sure and certain triumph in him. — *“In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (v. 33).

It is true, *“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Timothy 3:12). But persecution, mockery, or even death does not mean defeat. The fact is, all of God’s elect must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22); but out of their tribulation they shall come forth into everlasting glory with robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, in whom, by whom, and with whom we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:35-37). The powers of the world are impotent before God’s saints. It is written, — *“Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4. 4). Christ has already overcome the world; and your life is hid with Christ in God. — *“Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ”* (2 Corinthians 2:14; Revelation 19:1-9).

Chapter 105 The Comforter

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.” (John 16:7-16)

Four times in his final discourse before leaving this world our blessed Savior promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Ghost to be our Comforter (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). God the Holy Spirit is the Divine Comforter who dwells in every heaven-born soul, teaching us, guiding us, and comforting us by showing us our Lord Jesus Christ and the things of Christ, ever glorifying our blessed Savior. I want to show you seven things our Savior promised in these wonderful statements about the person and work of God the Holy Ghost.

The Comforter

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God to his church and people through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, our exalted Lord and King. Our Lord Jesus distinctly refers to the Spirit of God as “*The Comforter*.” That is the *first* thing we should see in this passage. Just as the Son of God, in his office capacity as our Mediator and Covenant Surety, is called our Savior, the Spirit of God is our Comforter.

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; [Even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

This title given to God the Spirit, “*The Comforter*,” is a very broad, meaningful title. It means one who comforts, who pleads, who exhorts, one who calls us to his side, as a father would call his child to his side when he has something personal to say to him.” Our Lord Jesus has given us his Spirit to dwell in us as our ever abiding Comforter. What a gift of grace!

Another Comforter

Second, our Savior calls the Holy Spirit “*another Comforter*.” — “*I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter*.” The word “*another*” is also very significant. It means another of the same kind, another just like me, one distinct from me, but exactly like me. Here are the three Persons of the Holy Trinity working together for our souls (1 John 5:7), the three Persons of the Triune Jehovah, linked together and united in covenant solidarity for the salvation of our souls, constantly engaged in the work of saving chosen sinners (Ephesians 1:3-14).

The Holy Ghost is “*another Comforter*” in addition to Christ, who is called “*the consolation of Israel*” (Luke 2:25). The Lord Jesus tells us that he is another instead of me. I am going, but he is coming. He will fill up my place; my place of fellowship, counsel, comfort, and love. He will be to you for consolation what I have been to you for consolation. He is another like me. He will be another, and yet not another; one in mind and sympathy with me toward you. In having him, you have me; and he will be another in addition to me. I am still

with you, though I go away; and in addition to my presence, you shall have the presence of another like me, another who is God, just as I am God.

Father's Gift

Third, this gift of the Holy Ghost as our Comforter is the Father's gift to every chosen, redeemed sinner. — *"I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter."* It is he of whom the Lord Jesus spoke when he said to the woman at the well, *"If thou knewest the gift of God"* (John 4:10). He said, *"If ye, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."* God the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, is the gift promised to Abraham and his Seed (Galatians 3:13-14), by which the Lord God seals all covenant blessings to his chosen (Ephesians 1:13-14).

It is the Father's good pleasure that we have the Holy Ghost. Having him we live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and pray in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17).

Christ's Intercession

Fourth, God the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon all the redeemed by the merit and efficacy of Christ's intercession on our behalf. He said, *"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter."* At the appointed time of love, God the Father sends his Spirit to every chosen, redeemed sinner in almighty, irresistible grace in regeneration, giving us life and faith in Christ (Ezekiel 16:6-8; 36:27; 37:14; Zechariah 12:10).

Abiding Comforter

The Lord Jesus promised that he would give us this Comforter forever, *"that He may abide with you forever!"* The Comforter is ours forever, unconditionally ours forever! For as long as time shall last, for as long as we are in this world of woe, God the Holy Ghost shall be our abiding Comforter. As the Shekinah Glory filled the Temple, abiding on the Mercy-seat, so God the Holy Spirit abides in us as the Spirit of Life. We live in the sweet *"communion of the Holy Ghost"* all the time (2 Corinthians 13:14). Though often we may grieve him, we shall never be deprived of him. Though we may quench him, we cannot lose him!

Spirit of Truth

Sixth, in John 14:17 our Savior describes the Comforter as *"the Spirit of truth."* He is the Spirit who communicates the truth to the soul. Christ is the truth he gives and communicates to us, the truth revealed in us by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Christ is the truth into which he guides us. The Word of Christ, Holy Scripture, is the truth by which he directs our paths.

The world cannot receive him. To the world God sends a strong delusion that they should believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12); but we know him; and by him dwelling in us, we know our election of God. The seed of the serpent cannot receive the Spirit of truth. Jude describes the ruin of the world like this. He says they are *"sensual, having not the Spirit"* (Jude 19). What a sad picture of lost men and women! They are without God, without Christ, without life, and without hope, having not the Spirit!

Divine Teacher

Seventh, I want us to look briefly at what our Savior tells us about the Holy Spirit as our Comforter in John 14:26. — *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."*

This Divine Comforter, God the Holy Ghost, is our teacher. It is God the Holy Spirit and God the Holy Spirit alone who teaches spiritual truth. He takes the things of Christ, the things that Christ taught and did, brings them to our remembrance, and causes us to see and understand them. — “*He shall testify of me,*” our Savior told us (John 15:26; 1 John 5:1-13). Sealing the Word of God to our hearts, causing us to hear the Gospel of our own salvation by Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14), giving us faith in Christ, the Spirit of God bears witness in our spirits that we are born of God.

What is it that the Holy Spirit teaches poor, needy sinners, by which he causes the chosen to know they are chosen, by which he causes the redeemed to know they are redeemed, by which he causes the called to know they are called? What is it that God the Holy Spirit teaches us and brings to our remembrance that gives us the sweet comfort of assured mercy, love, and grace in Christ?

- Redemption Accomplished — He convinces the sinner that redemption is accomplished by Christ (John 16:7-11).
- Things to Come — He convinces us of “*things to come,*” that is to say of things that must come as the result of Christ’s obedience unto death as our Substitute and Surety (John 16:12-13; 1 John 3:1-9; 4:17). What comfort the Spirit gives when he convinces a poor sinner of all that Christ has obtained and secured for him by his obedience and death as his Substitute: — Eternal Redemption! — Absolute Forgiveness! — Complete Justification! — Perfect Righteousness! — Full Sanctification! — Eternal Life! — The Resurrection of Our Bodies! — Certain Glory!
- Christ Glorified — And God the Holy Ghost comforts the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by convincing us that Christ is glorified (John 16:14-16).

He glorifies Christ by showing us the things of Christ. God the Holy Spirit always points men to Christ. By the preaching of the Gospel he shows the things of Christ, effectually revealing Christ in the called, and thereby glorifies him. The Gospel we preach is the good news of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Not only does he glorify Christ by showing us his glory as our Redeemer, he shows us that Christ is glorified by the Triune Jehovah as our Redeemer (John 16:15, Philippians 2:9-11). This is our comfort: Redemption is accomplished! Salvation is sure! Christ is glorified! All things are in the hands of him who loved us and gave himself for us! Christ is on his Throne: all is well. Christ is glorified: all is well!

“O spread the tidings ‘round, wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;
Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:
The Comforter has come!

The long, long night is past, the morning breaks at last,
And hushed the dreadful wail and fury of the blast,
As o’er the golden hills the day advances fast!
The Comforter has come!

Lo, the great King of kings, with healing in His wings,
To every captive soul a full deliverance brings;
And through the vacant cells the song of triumph rings;
The Comforter has come!

O boundless love Divine! How shall this tongue of mine
To wond’ring mortals tell the matchless grace Divine
That I, a child of hell, should in His image shine!
The Comforter has come!

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come!
The Holy Ghost from Heav'n, the Father's promise giv'n;
O spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found
The Comforter has come!"

Chapter 106
The Expedience and the Comfort

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.” (John 16:7-14)

Here our blessed Savior tells us that His death upon the cursed tree as our Substitute was for us a matter of expedience, something needful and profitable for our souls. Then He tells us why that is so. The sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way sinners could ever obtain God’s salvation, the only way we could ever know God, the only way fallen man could ever live in communion with the Triune Jehovah. In Galatians 3:13-14 the Spirit of God tells us exactly the same thing.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

The Expedience

First, let me show you the expedience of our Savior’s death. Then, I will tell you a little about the comfort of His Holy Spirit.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” (John 16:7)

It was necessary for the Lord Jesus Christ to go away. He must be lifted up upon the cursed tree. He must suffer and die. He must rise from the dead, ascend back into heaven and appear in the presence of God for us. Otherwise, we could never have been saved. The purpose of God, the Word of God, the promises of God, and the covenant of grace would all have been defeated and proven a lie. This is what our Savior meant when he said, — “*It is expedient for you that I go away.*”

Behold the Lord Jesus, hanging upon the cursed tree, and learn the meaning of those words. Standing at the foot of the cross, as I beheld the Holy One nailed to the cursed tree, covered with His own blood and the spit of an enraged mob, made to be sin, forsaken and cursed of God His Father, yet, realizing that this is the work of God’s own hand, I am lost in astonishment! I am filled with reverence and awe (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13).

“Yonder (Amazing sight!) I see
The incarnate Son of God
Expiring on the cursed tree,
And weltering in His blood.

Behold, a purple torrent run
Down from His hands and head,
The crimson tide puts out the sun;
His groans awake the dead.

The trembling earth, the darkened sky,
Proclaim the truth aloud;
And with the amazed centurion, cry,
“This is the Son of God!”

Awed as I am with reverence for my crucified Lord, still there is a question that I cannot suppress, a question that reason and sound judgment cannot fail to ask. The question is, Why? Why did the Son of God suffer such a death? Why did God so torment His beloved Son and kill Him in such a horribly ignominious way? Was it to save my soul? I know that He died that I might live. He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring me to God. But was there no other way for the omnipotent God to save me? Was all this done to demonstrate the greatness of God’s love to me? Indeed it was (Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10).

“Jesus, who left His throne on high,
Left the bright realms of bliss,
And came to earth to bleed and die,
Was ever love like this?”

But, surely, God could have revealed His love to me in some other way. Why did He slay his Son? What necessity was there for the Son of God to suffer and die upon the cursed tree? What was the expedience of His death?

Only one answer can be found to that question. — The justice of God had to be satisfied. There was no necessity for God to save anyone. Salvation is altogether the free gift of His grace. But, having determined to save His elect from the ruins of fallen humanity, the only way God could save His people and forgive their sins was by the death of Christ. — *“Without shedding of blood is no remission”* (Hebrews 9:22). The justice of God had to be satisfied in order for God to save His people; and the only thing that could ever satisfy the justice of God is the blood of Christ.

“If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.” — Had Christ not gone away the Holy Spirit would never have come in His office capacity as the Comforter of His people, Reprover of the world, Teacher of truth, and Glorifier of Christ. There would have been nothing for Him to do! Had Christ not gone away, there would have been no blood to sprinkle, no righteousness to reveal, no salvation to bestow, and no Mediator to glorify.

Without question, the Holy Spirit was in the world from the beginning (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 51:11). Without Him, the prophets could not have prophesied and the Old Testament saints could not have been saved. But He was not poured out upon all flesh (the Gentile world), for the gathering of God’s elect from the four corners of the earth, until Christ died and ascended back to heaven. This coming of the Holy Spirit was the direct result of Christ’s accomplished redemption and His exaltation and glory as our Savior (Galatians 3:13-14; John 7:39; Psalm 68:18; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:33).

One Condition

In the infinitely wise and orderly arrangements of the covenant of grace all the blessings of the covenant were conditioned upon one thing. And that one thing was the obedience of Christ as the Surety of God’s elect, His righteousness and blood atonement. As God the Holy Spirit is the Conveyor of all grace, He could not come to convey to us the blessings of grace promised in the covenant until our Surety had earned and purchased them for us. The sending of the Spirit was the fruit of Christ’s purchase. Therefore, He could not come until the purchase was made. But, inasmuch as Christ has by His blood purchased God’s elect from under the curse of

the law and purchased for us all the blessings of the covenant, the Spirit of God must and shall come to every redeemed sinner in irresistible, saving power. He comes to seal to us all that the Father promised and the Son purchased by giving us life and faith in Christ, and preserving us in grace until the resurrection day.

Our Lord had just told His disciples that He must suffer, die, rise from the dead, and ascend back to His Father in heaven, that there He would prepare a place for them, and that at the time appointed He would come again to receive them unto Himself. Then He assured them that, upon His ascension back into heaven, He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to minister to them.

These things are all recorded in John 13, 14, and 15. They should have flooded the disciples' hearts with joy. The disciples should have been full of questions about these great, mysterious, and wonderful things. Instead, sorrow filled their hearts. Then the Savior spoke to quieten their fears and show them the necessity of His going away, His death upon the cursed tree, His resurrection, His ascension, and His heavenly exaltation. He said, *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."*

Pause a moment and learn a lesson: — Those things that appear to be most grievous in their experience are often most expedient in their end. Thank God that He does not deal with us according to the folly of our own wills, but graciously gives us what He knows is good for us!

An expedience is that which is, being constrained by necessity, the best course to follow. Our Lord in this place is essentially saying, "It is both necessary and good for you that I should suffer, die, rise from the dead, and go back to my Father in heaven."

The expedience of our Savior's death should be obvious to anyone: — Had He not gone away, had He not suffered and died as our Substitute upon the cursed tree and ascended back to heaven, we could not have been saved. He could not have finished the work which he had come to do (Hebrews 10:5-10). God could not be just and yet justify them that believe (Romans 3:24-26; Isaiah 45:21). There would have been no atonement for sin (Hebrews 9:22). We could never have obtained the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation to God, peace, pardon, and righteousness (Colossians 1:20-22). We would have no Forerunner, High Priest, and Advocate in heaven (1 John 2:1-2). There would have been no way of access to God for guilty sinners (Hebrews 10:19). Christ could never have saved His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

The Comfort

Now, let me show you just a little about the comforting work of the Holy Spirit. How does God the Holy Spirit comfort chosen, redeemed sinners? Hear what the Lord Jesus tells us in the next verse (John 16:8). — *"When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* This is the errand upon which the Spirit of God has been sent into the world. This is the work of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter of God's elect. He is the Spirit of Truth. He reveals to and teaches chosen men and women the truth of God. Apart from the illumination of the Spirit, no one can know the truth. He is the Spirit of Reproof. By the preaching of the Gospel, the Spirit of God speaks to the hearts of His people to rebuke, reprimand, and reprove them for their sin and unbelief. And He is the Spirit of Conviction. By the preaching of the Gospel, He effectually convinces God's elect of their sin, Christ's righteousness, and of God's judgment of sin by Christ.

Legal Term

The word that is translated here *"reprove,"* and in the margin *"convince"* is a legal term. It speaks of the work of a jury in a court of law. When a man is charged with a crime, upon hearing the testimony of others and weighing the evidence, if the jury sees that the man is beyond any reasonable doubt guilty, being convinced by the evidence given, they find the man guilty; and he is convicted. Feelings may enter into their emotions. But

feelings must not enter into their judgment. You see, feelings have nothing to do with conviction. Conviction is the result of unanswerable arguments and irrefutable evidence.

When God the Holy Spirit comes upon a sinner in saving grace and power, He convicts him, by the unanswerable, irrefutable Word of God, of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This conviction is the sovereign prerogative of God the Holy Spirit. He accomplishes it by almighty, irresistible grace. Man may open the Word and preach it. But only the Spirit of God can effectually open the heart, apply the Word, and convict the sinner.

When our Savior says, “*He will reprove the world,*” He is not suggesting that every person in the world will be the object of the Spirit’s work. That would make His work a failure, for all are not convinced. Our Lord’s meaning is that the Holy Spirit will effectually and savingly convict His elect throughout all the world, Gentiles as well as Jews, some of every age, some in every nation. He will savingly convict every elect, redeemed sinner by the irresistible power of His grace.

Holy Spirit Conviction

The comfort of the Spirit is Holy Spirit conviction; and Holy Spirit conviction is essential to saving faith in Christ. I do not say that Holy Spirit conviction is a prerequisite, or condition that must be met before a person can trust Christ. That is a dreadful mistake in the thinking of many. Our Lord never calls upon sinners to be convicted and then believe on Him. You must simply trust Christ. Trust Him and you are saved, forgiven of all sin, and have eternal life. There are no conditions to faith in Christ. There are no prerequisites for you to meet, doctrinally, experimentally, or emotionally, before you can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, our Lord does tell us plainly that one distinguishing characteristic of saving faith is that it is always accompanied by Holy Spirit conviction. Where there is no conviction, there is no conversion. Where there is no conviction, there is no faith. Where there is no conviction, there is no knowledge of Christ. Where there is no conviction there is no saving union with Christ. Wherever there is true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is Holy Spirit conviction. And wherever there is true Holy Spirit conviction, there is true, saving faith in Christ. The two always go together.

The question that must be answered is this: — What is Holy Spirit conviction? I have heard and read many answers given by men to that question, which have no foundation in the Word of God. Most people think that Holy Spirit conviction is a feeling of deep remorse for sin, a dreadful sense of one’s lost condition, a terrifying fear of God’s wrath, and/or an ardent desire to be saved. These things may, and very often do accompany Holy Spirit conviction; but nowhere in the Word of God is conviction described in such terms.

If we would know what Holy Spirit conviction is, we must look to the Word of God alone, putting out of our minds the opinions of men. What you and I may think and feel about the matter is of no importance. We only want to know what God says. And this is the way God our Savior describes Holy Spirit conviction...

“When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).

Sin

Holy Spirit conviction deals with these three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment. “*He will reprove the world of sin.*” — When God the Holy Spirit comes to a sinner’s heart in saving power and grace, this is the first thing he does: He reproves, convinces, and convicts the sinner that he is a sinner, deserving eternal damnation. Where there is no Holy Spirit conviction of sin, there is no saving faith in Christ. When a man experiences real conviction of sin, he takes sides with God against himself, justifying God in his own condemnation (Psalm

51:4-5). The Spirit of God so thoroughly convinces a man of his sinfulness that he gladly takes his place with the publican and cries, “*God be merciful to me, I am the sinner.*”

He convinces us of the fact of sin. We have sinned against God. In our father Adam we rebelled against God, we were born with hearts of rebellion and sin, and we have chosen the path of rebellion against God. We are all sinners by nature, sinners at heart, sinners by choice, and sinners by deed.

The Holy Spirit convinces us of the fault of sin. Our sin is much more than an act of evil against man. Sin is an affront to God. It is an attack upon the throne of God. It is a denial of God’s right to be God. Sin is a monstrous attempt to rape God, to rob Him of His dignity and glory as God. — “*Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*”

In conviction, the Holy Spirit convinces us of the folly of sin. It is the most foolish thing in the world that a man should sin against God. Sin is utter madness. What fool will dare to stand against the Almighty?

God the Holy Spirit convinces us of the filth of sin. He shows us that sin has made us loathsome and obnoxious in the sight of God. It has rendered both me and all that I do unacceptable to a holy God.

The Spirit of God convinces us of the fountain of sin. Sin arises from our own evil hearts. Sin is not so much what we do as it is what we are. Because man’s heart is a fountain of evil, it brings forth nothing but corruption, vileness, and sin.

And the Holy Spirit convinces us of the fruit of sin. — “*The wages of sin is death.*” The just reward of my sin is eternal damnation.

Specifically, our Savior declares that God the Holy Spirit will convince sinners of sin, “*because they believe not on me.*” That is to say, He convinces us of the folly of attempting to save ourselves by our own works. Salvation does not come by anything the natural man can do. A person cannot be saved by repeating a prayer, by walking a church aisle, by making a decision, by being baptized and joining the church, or by obedience to the law of God. Salvation comes to helpless, dead sinners only by faith in Christ, faith wrought in the heart by the mighty, effectual operations of God the Holy Spirit. Salvation is the result of Holy Spirit conviction. Our Lord Jesus declares that when the Spirit of God comes in saving grace to a sinner He will convince that person “*of sin, because they believe not on me.*”

When the Spirit of God convicts a person of his sin, the convicted sinner is graciously forced to see and acknowledge his guilt before the holy God (Psalm 51:3-5). And he sees that he is utterly without ability to change his nature.

I know that the whole world has sinned and is guilty before God. But the Lord God has graciously shown me that I am guilty, deserving of His wrath, and without excuse before Him. The evidence is all in. It is irrefutable. I am convinced. I am guilty. From the depths of my filthy soul I cry, “*God be merciful to me, the sinner!*” This conviction is contrary to nature. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

The specific issue of conviction is unbelief. All men know by nature that such things as robbery, adultery, and murder are sin. But it is a supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit that convinces us that unbelief is sin. Indeed, unbelief is the greatest of all sins, and the most damning. Unbelief is the heart of man declaring that God is a liar (1 John 5:10). Every sin is damning. But no sin is as damning as unbelief. The heathen are lost for want of knowledge. But those who upon hearing the Gospel refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are lost for want of faith, by their willful, obstinate unbelief. So their unbelief shall be their condemnation. It is unbelief that keeps them from entering into rest. Unbelief deserves and shall have the unmitigated, everlasting

wrath of almighty God in hell. Blessed is the man or woman who by the Spirit of God is convicted of sin and turned from unbelief to faith in Christ!

Righteousness

When the Spirit of God comes in saving power to a sinner, He convicts the sinner of righteousness. — *“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more”* (John 16:10). — The basis of this conviction is the fact that Christ has ascended back to His Father in heaven. What is this conviction of righteousness? It is the conviction that God demands righteousness, that I cannot produce righteousness, and that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought in an everlasting righteousness by his obedience to God as the sinners’ Substitute. Blessed be God, our Savior’s name is JEHOVAH-TSIDKINU, — THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Behold the crucified Christ, slain under the penalty of sin, buried, risen again, ascended back into heaven, exalted to the throne of everlasting glory, and be convinced that He has brought in an everlasting, all-sufficient righteousness for all who trust Him. — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...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 is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”* (Romans 8:1, 3, 4, 34).

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all the requirements of righteousness by His obedience to God as our Representative (Romans 5:19). As a man, He did all that God in His law requires of men. And He did it for His people, to work out a righteousness that God might impute to and bestow upon His elect.

In His death as our Substitute Christ satisfied the righteous and just penalty of God’s law due to our sins (Galatians 3:13). He redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. He was made to be sin for us. Our sins were imputed to Him. And God punished Him, to the full satisfaction of justice, for our sins, so that He might in justice forgive our sins (Romans 3:24-26).

Because Christ was made sin for us and died for our sins, all for whom He died are made the righteousness of God in Him. Every sinner who trusts Christ is righteous before God, made righteous By righteousness imputed in justification and by righteousness imparted in sanctification. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us by God’s work alone, we are made the righteousness of God in Him by God’s work alone.

Judgment

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” (John 16:8-11)

Looking upon my own heart, in the light of God’s Word, I am thoroughly convinced of my own depravity, guilt, and sin before God. I know that I deserve His infinite wrath. Looking upon that Man in heaven Who is God, Who was once made to be sin for sinful man and is now freed from sin, I am thoroughly convinced that His righteousness is infinitely meritorious and sufficient to give all who trust Him eternal, immutable acceptance with the holy God. And looking upon Christ’s conquest over Satan by His death upon the cursed tree, I am thoroughly convinced of judgment, convinced that judgment is finished for all for whom this great and glorious Savior died at Calvary. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. When He saves a sinner, He convinces him of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This conviction of judgment is threefold.

1. God will judge all sin (Acts 17:31). As the Lord God judged Satan for sin, casting him out of heaven, binding him by the cross of Christ, and sentencing him to everlasting destruction in hell, so He will judge the sins of all men and women in the last day. None shall escape the justice and wrath of almighty God. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die!”*
2. God’s judgment of men for sin is just. Sin is more than an act. It is a principle of enmity against God in the heart of every man. It is treason against the King of heaven and malice against our Creator. The goodness and justice of God demand that wickedness be put out of the earth and that sinners be punished with everlasting destruction (Psalm 11:4-7). Should God punish me forever in hell, He is perfectly just to do so. Should He punish you forever in hell, He is just. We deserve eternal damnation.
3. For God’s elect, judgment is over! The Lord God judged our sins in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He made His dear Son to be sin for us, and punished us for sin, to the full satisfaction of His holy justice, in His darling Son. The proof that judgment is over for the believer is the fact that Christ has taken Satan into captivity, delivering us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15).

If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you have nothing to fear from God, His law, or His justice. Your sins are forever forgiven. You have been made perfectly righteous in Christ. You are complete in him. And for you, judgment is over.

Divine Guidance

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you.” (John 16:12-14)

God the Holy Spirit comforts us by revealing the Gospel to us; and He comforts us by guiding us, sweetly, effectually guiding us into all truth.

Matthew Poole rightly observed that the word here translated “*guide*” implies that the Holy Spirit both reveals the truth to God’s saints and bows our wills to the truth He reveals. He not only shows us what the truth is, He bows us to the truth.

Though this text is primarily a declaration of apostolic inspiration, it clearly has application to all believers. The Spirit’s work in a person is not over when he has been convicted. The Holy Spirit graciously guides all believers into all truth that is needful, useful, and profitable for them. He does so through the ministry of the Word, causing saints to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). It is written, “*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*” (1 John 2:20). This is not a promise of universal, spiritual knowledge. But it is a promise of true spiritual knowledge. As the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, shows us the things of Christ, He guides us into truth, for Christ is “*all truth*” (John 14:6). And all who are saved by His grace bow to, receive, and love His truth.

“*He will show you things to come.*” — These “*things to come*” are things that shall, most assuredly follow as the result of Christ’s accomplished redemption: — The Sure Salvation of All the Redeemed — The Complete Forgiveness of All My Sin — The Resurrection Glory of the Redeemed — The Everlasting Praise of the Redeemer.

“*He shall glorify Me.*” — Here our Savior tells us that “*all truth*” revealed and taught by the Spirit of God glorifies Christ. Anything that is of God glorifies Christ, not the preacher, not the church, not a man, but Christ. By this you may determine whether any doctrine or ordinance, religious work or religious experience is

of God: — Does it, or does it not glorify Christ alone? God the Holy Spirit gives comfort to our souls by glorifying our blessed Redeemer in His accomplishments as Our Savior (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). — Blessed expedience! — Blessed Comfort! — Blessed Savior! — Blessed Comforter!

Chapter 107
The Comfort of Conviction

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” (John 16:7-11)

Do you know anything about Holy Spirit conviction? Holy Spirit conviction is the very first work of God’s grace in sinners. Holy Spirit conviction is as essential to the salvation of our souls as blood atonement. But there are few who know anything about it. When was the last time you heard a preacher preach about Holy Spirit conviction? What do you know about it? Have you experienced it?

On August 13, 1833, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, a young, 20 year old preacher in Scotland, wrote these words in his diary, — “Clear conviction of sin is the only true origin of dependence on another’s righteousness, and therefore (strange to say!) of the Christian’s peace of mind and cheerfulness.” That is precisely the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 16. — The Holy Spirit comforts sinners by convincing us of sin.

“To understand God’s Word aright
This grand distinction must be known:
Though all are sinners in God’s sight,
There are but few so in their own.
To such as these our Lord was sent;
They’re only sinners who repent.

What comfort can a Savior bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing;
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.
New life from Him we must receive,
Before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own,
Well worthy ‘tis to be believed,
That Christ into the world came down,
That sinners might by Him be saved.
Sinners are high in His esteem,
And sinners highly value Him.”

—*Joseph Hart*

Sins of Ignorance

In the 4th and 5th chapters of Leviticus the Lord God gave detailed instructions concerning “*sins of ignorance*.” Six times the Lord told Moses that once any sin of ignorance was made known, atonement must be made by the divinely appointed sacrifice, and once atonement was made the offence would be forgiven. That is exactly the order of things in our experience of God’s saving grace in Christ.

1. Sin must be made known. The sinner must be convinced of his sin.
 2. Atonement must be made. The convinced sinner must bring the sacrifice God requires: — Jesus Christ crucified.
 3. The sinner convinced of his sin, the sinner for whom atonement has been made, is forgiven of his sin.
- That is the comfort of conviction promised by our Savior in John 16:7-11.

The fact is none of us know our sin, except as God the Holy Spirit causes us to know it. None can or will confess his sin, except God the Holy Spirit convince him of his sin. Here are five things involved in the saving operations of God the Holy Spirit.

The Commission of the Spirit

The Lord Jesus says, “*I will send Him unto you*” (v. 7). — “*I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever*” (John 14:16). As the Lord Jesus came into the world as our Mediator, with a commission from the Father to redeem and save his elect, so too God the Holy Spirit comes to chosen sinners as our divine Comforter with a commission. He is sent of the Father and sent of the Son to effectually apply the blood of Christ to the redeemed, to effectually apply the salvation Christ obtained with his blood, to sprinkle the blood upon the redeemed. The Spirit of God comes as the Seal of the covenant (Ephesians 1:13-14). He comes with covenant commission to regenerate, call, sanctify, and preserve every chosen, redeemed sinner. His commission is to make sinners new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). His commission is to unite the Redeemer and the redeemed. His commission is to bring us to Christ. The Lord Jesus sends his Spirit to his chosen as David sent Ziba to get Mephibosheth, with a work to do: — “*Fetch him!*” And when He comes, He fetches the redeemed to the Redeemer.

The Coming of the Spirit

At the appointed time of love, the Lord Jesus sends his Spirit to give life to his redeemed and bring his ransomed “*into the bond of the covenant*” (Jeremiah 29:11-13; Ezekiel 16:6-8; 20:37; 37:1-14; John 3:3-8). — “*Ye must be born again!*” When God the Holy Spirit comes in omnipotent mercy, the chosen, redeemed sinner is born again, Christ is revealed, and faith is created in the sinner, causing him, by irresistible grace, to come to the Savior. This is what we call the effectual call of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-14). The work of God the Holy Spirit by which he causes chosen, redeemed sinners to trust the Lord Jesus is performed in us by causing us to hear “*the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation*” (v. 13). That is what our Lord Jesus is talking about in John 16:7-11.

The Conviction of the Spirit

When God the Holy Spirit comes in saving power, he causes the sinner to know his sin, to know the atonement made for his sin, and to know the forgiveness of his sin by Christ Jesus (John 16:7-11). When we are made to know our sin, seeing Christ crucified for us, we confess our sin, the Fountain of cleansing is opened before us, and we are washed and made clean in our consciences before God (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1; 1 John 1:7-10).

The Conquest of the Spirit

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” (John 16:13)

The word translated “*guide*” is, as Matthew Poole wrote, “a word of great emphasis; it strictly signifieth to be a guide of the way, not only to discover truth as the object of the understanding, but the bowing of the will to the obedience of it.” When God the Holy Spirit saves a sinner, he does so by conquering the rebel, by sweetly forcing us to bow to Christ, who is all Truth, and bow to all the truth revealed in him: the truth about ourselves, the truth about our Savior, and the truth about his salvation.

The Comfort of the Spirit

But how does this conviction work of the Spirit give us comfort. *First*, this convicting work of the Spirit is the revelation of God's love in Christ (1 John 4:9-10). *Second*, this convicting work of the Holy Spirit gives comfort to our souls by shedding abroad the love of God in us, which gives us "*good hope through grace*" (Romans 5:5-11). *Third*, Holy Ghost conviction causes us to rest in God's perfect love, which casts out all fear (1 John 4:16-19).

All hail! Atoning Lamb,
Whose off'ring once for all,
Appointed by the great I AM,
Redeemed us from the fall.

Your efficacious blood,
By pow'r Divine applied,
Makes perfect all the Church of God, —
By free grace sanctified.

No condemnation now,
Against the chosen race,
Perfect, forever, Lord we bow,
And triumph in Your grace.

Here then my soul shall rest,
With Jesus' blood applied,
Redeemed and perfect, ever blest,
In Him I'm satisfied.

So I will make my boast
In Jesus crucified: —
Perfected with the heav'nly host,
I shall be glorified!

Chapter 108
The Conviction of Righteousness

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” (John 16:7-11)

When the Spirit of God comes in saving power to a sinner, he convicts the sinner of righteousness. — “*Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more*” (John 16:10). Do you know anything about that? Do you know anything about righteousness?

In his mighty, saving operations of grace, God the Holy Spirit convicts sinners of righteousness. The basis of this conviction is the fact that Christ has ascended back to his Father in heaven. What is this conviction of righteousness? It is the conviction that God demands righteousness, that I cannot produce righteousness, and that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought in an everlasting righteousness by his obedience to God as the sinners’ Substitute. Blessed be God, our Savior’s name is Jehovah-Tsidkinu, — “**THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16).

Behold the crucified Christ, slain under the penalty of sin, buried, risen again, ascended back into heaven, exalted to the throne of everlasting glory, and be convinced that he has brought in an everlasting, all-sufficient righteousness for all who trust him (Romans 8:1, 3, 4, 34).

In his Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus tells us what God requires of us. If you will look at the last verse of Matthew 5, you will see that God’s requirement is more than sincerely endeavoring to do that which is good, and more than sincerely desiring to be righteous. — “*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48).

How good does a person have to be to go to heaven? The answer could not be more plainly given. The Son of God says, “*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*” This requirement of perfection, perfect holiness, is given by our God repeatedly throughout the Scriptures ((Leviticus 19:1-2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Hebrews 12:14; Revelation 21:27). This is still God’s word to us today. — “*Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.*” Because the Lord our God is holy, he requires that we also be holy.

The Pharisees

In Matthew 5:20 our Savior declares, “*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*” The Scribes and the Pharisees were regarded by the ancient Jews as the most devoted, most spiritual, and most holy of all men. They were men of such high esteem and reputation that the Jews had a saying about them: “If but two of all the world were to go to heaven the one would be a scribe and the other a Pharisee.”

In so far as outward, religious righteousness was concerned no one excelled those two groups of men. In works of piety they made long public prayers on the corners of streets, so that all could see and hear their devotion. In works of charity they gave alms, blowing the trumpet, so that all would be impressed by their generosity. In works of equity they paid their tithes, counting out ten percent on their gross income. In works of courtesy and hospitality they often held banquets, even for the Lord Jesus and his disciples (Luke 7).

Three Lessons

Yet, the Savior declares that our righteousness must exceed, not match but exceed, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. If it does not, we cannot be saved. Our Savior clearly teaches us three things in Matthew 5:20:

1. There will be no admission into heaven without righteousness.
2. A legal, Pharisaical righteousness will never be accepted of God.
3. The only hope any sinner has of being saved is through the righteousness of a divinely appointed and accepted Substitute and Representative. And that Substitute and Representative is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 9:31-10:4). Christ is that holiness we must have, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

The only way a guilty sinner can be saved and obtain righteousness before God is through faith in Jesus Christ, Jehovah-tsidkenu – The Lord our Righteousness. Because there is so much ignorance and confusion about righteousness, because most people, like the Jews of old, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, are going about to establish their own righteousness and refuse to submit themselves to Christ alone for righteousness, it is a subject of immense importance and one that should be of great interest to every eternity bound sinner. Here are six things revealed in the Word of God about this matter of righteousness.

God’s Requirement

First, as we have seen already, the Book of God universally declares that the holy, Lord God requires righteousness. Righteousness is demanded by him. God is holy. Being perfectly holy, he demands perfect holiness. He requires perfect righteousness. Anything and anyone that is not perfectly holy will be consumed by the fire of his glorious holiness. He declares, *“I am Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect”* (Genesis 17:1). — *“It shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein”* (Leviticus 22:21). — *“Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:16). We read in Hebrews 12:14 that there is a holiness to be pursued, without which no man shall see the Lord. God demands character holiness. We are required to be holy on the inside, in heart, at the very core of our being. — *“The Lord looketh on the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7). He demands conduct holiness. We must be holy on the outside, in behavior. — *“Be ye holy in all manner of conversation”* (1 Peter 1:15). In a word, God demands complete holiness. We must be entirely without sin. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20).

God demands holiness; but we cannot produce holiness. Not one of us can do one good thing before God. It is written, *“There is none that doeth good, no not one”* (Romans 3:12). Purity cannot come from our corrupt nature. We cannot even seek the Lord on our own, much less correct our past record, change our present wretchedness (Psalm 51:1-5), or control our future thoughts and deeds (Galatians 3:10).

The whole purpose of God’s law is to show us our utter inability to keep it and to convince us of our need of a Substitute (Galatians 3:24). And the first work of God the Holy Spirit in a sinner’s heart is to convince him of sin, of his need of a Substitute.

A person’s definition of righteousness depends entirely upon his understanding of who God is. The problem with this religious generation is that they have never seen the holy, righteous, just character of God almighty. They have never seen the absolute holiness of God. And no one will ever see the holy character of God until he sees what happened at Calvary (Isaiah 6:1-7).

How good does a person have to be to get to heaven? He must be as good as God. — *“It must be perfect to be accepted.”* God cannot and will not accept anything short of perfection. — *“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted upon his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully”* (Psalm 24:3-4), and no one else. Yet, it is written, *“They that are in the flesh cannot please God.”* — *“Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them”* (Galatians 3:10).

No Righteousness

Second, let me remind you that you and I have no righteousness of our own. We lost all righteousness in the sin and fall of our father Adam. — *“There is none righteous!”* We have no ability to produce righteousness, or even to make any contribution toward it. — *“There is none that doeth good; no, not one!”* All the sons and daughters of Adam are all sinners. We lost all righteousness before God in the garden. We are all totally depraved. We have all gone astray from the womb speaking lies. We all drink iniquity like water. So thorough and complete is the depravity of man that even our works of righteousness are filthy rags before the holy Lord God; and we are all at our best estate altogether vanity (Psalms 14:2-3; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19; Romans 5:12).

The fact is, the natural man has absolutely no idea what righteousness is, where it is to be found, or how it can be obtained; but he thinks he does. — *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15).

This is the first thing to be established. We have no righteousness, and no ability to produce righteousness. Yet, our Lord said, *“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* In making that statement our Lord declared that there has never been one son or daughter of Adam on this earth good enough, righteous enough, or holy enough to inherit and inhabit the kingdom of heaven. There is not now and never will be one person in heaven who is there because he was good, righteous, and holy in this world. — *“Man at his best estate is altogether vanity.”* — *“Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God’s sight.”*

We must get the idea of “righteousness” out of our minds, and get the word “righteousness” out of our vocabulary, insofar as any human works are concerned in God’s sight. Our righteousnesses are filthy rags before the holy Lord God (Isaiah 64:6; Isaiah 1:16-20). Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). Read the Book of God and you will discover that every man in the Book who knew God, who knew the righteous character of God, and had been made righteous in Christ, lamented his own utter wickedness.

Still, God requires perfect righteousness. The fact that we cannot produce righteousness does not mean that righteousness cannot be produced. God can do it. Man cannot please God; but God can please God. Man cannot produce righteousness; but God can produce righteousness.

Christ’s Righteousness

Third, the Lord Jesus Christ has established and brought in everlasting righteousness by his obedience and death as our Substitute and Surety. The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to fulfil all righteousness, not for himself, but for us (Matthew 3:15; 5:17). — *“The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake,”* because he magnified the law and made it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). He did for us exactly what Daniel 9:24 said he would do. He finished the transgression. He made an end of sin for us, putting away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. He made reconciliation for iniquity by satisfying the justice of God as our Substitute. And he brought in everlasting righteousness by his obedience to the will of God in all things as our Representative and Federal Head.

In his life Christ Jesus rendered perfect obedience to the law as our Representative. And in his death he satisfied the claims of the law as our Substitute. Therefore, the prophet of God declares of Christ, *“This is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness,”* and of us, *“This is the name whereby she shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness”* (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). That is the message that is set before us and sweetly declared in 2nd Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 5:18-21).

The Lord Jesus Christ is our only righteousness, and it is our joy to confess that he is. — *“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Imputed Righteousness

Fourth, the fourth aspect of righteousness revealed in the Book of God is the fact that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all who trust him alone for righteousness in free justification. The only way a sinner can be made righteous is by the holy Lord God making him righteous. In justification God imputes the righteousness of Christ to his people in exactly the same way as he made his darling Son sin for us (Romans 5:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). How are sinners made to become the righteousness of God in Christ? I appeal to the Word of God alone for the answer to that question. The opinions of men are totally irrelevant. What does the Book say? Nothing else matters.— *“FREELY!”*

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3:20-26)

When Christ was made sin for us, that was a one time, once for all act accomplished in the past, a work in which he was personally involved. But when the Holy Spirit speaks of us being *“made the righteousness of God in him,”* the word he uses for *“made”* is another word altogether. It is a present tense, passive verb, implying total passivity on our part, and means *“continually cause to become.”* He is telling us that those for whom Christ was made sin, God continually causes to become the righteousness of God in him, without them doing a thing. Let me show you how he has done it and is doing it.

Eternally — Our great, all-wise, eternally gracious God made us righteous before the world was made, in his sovereign, eternal purpose of grace in Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 1). If we were blessed of God with all spiritual blessings before the world began and accepted in the Beloved from everlasting, it was not as unrighteous but as the righteousness of God in Christ.

Judicially — We were made to become the righteousness of God judicially, in a legal sense, when the Lord Jesus died as our Substitute under the wrath of God, satisfying divine justice for us. When he had put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he obtained eternal redemption for us; and we were made to become the righteousness of God in him by divine imputation in justification, *“being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ”* (Romans 4:25; 5:12, 17-21).

Experimentally — But this matter of being made the righteousness of God in Christ, while it is something with which we have no involvement, is not just a matter of law, any more than Christ’s being made sin was just a matter of law. It is not something that takes place altogether outside our experience, any more than Christ being made sin was outside his experience. Sinners are made the righteousness of God in Christ experimentally in the new birth, when we are made *“partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Peter 1:4). That holy thing in us that is born of God, that John tells us cannot sin (1 John 3:9), is *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27). We experience this blessed thing (being made the righteousness of God) in the inmost depths of our souls, in the constant assurance of our access to, acceptance with, and forgiveness of our sins by our God

(1 John 1:7-2:2). We are in Christ, in whom alone God is well pleased. That means he is well pleased with us (Matthew 17:5). Our sacrifices are accepted of God as a sweet-smelling savor in Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Our sins are never imputed to us, but perpetually forgiven, because we are one with him who was once made sin for us, in whom we are perpetually made to become the righteousness of God.

Absolutely — Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, every sinner who trusts him is made to become the righteousness of God in him absolutely (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:12). Discerning the Lord's body, that is to say, knowing our need of a Substitute and knowing the Substitute himself, trusting his finished work and trusting him, sinners like you and me are worthy to enter his church, worthy to call upon his name, worthy to receive the Lord's Table, and worthy to enter into and possess forever his glory!

Everlastingly — We shall be made to become the righteousness of God everlastingly in the last day in resurrection glory. We shall be raised in righteousness. We shall be declared righteous according to the record book of heaven at the Day of Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15; Jeremiah 50:20). In that great day we shall be declared righteous to wondering worlds to the glory of our God forever (Ephesians 2:7). Then, we shall forever begin to enjoy, in such experimental reality as words cannot describe, the blessedness of being made to become the righteousness of God in Christ (Revelation 21:2-5; 22:1-6).

I am lost in wonder! All this, all that Christ has as the God-man my Mediator, we have in him. All that he is, we are in him. All that he enjoys, soon, I shall enjoy forever in him, because...

“If any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 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. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

Imparted Righteousness

Fifth, not only is the righteousness of God imputed to us in justification, the righteousness of God in Christ is imparted to every chosen, redeemed sinner in sanctification, by the regenerating work of God the Holy Spirit. In regeneration we are sanctified, made holy, by righteousness being imparted to us by the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:23-24; 2 Peter 1:4; Colossians 1:27; 1 John 3:5-9). Believers are people with two natures (Romans 7:14-24), that holy seed which is born of God and cannot sin (1 John 3:9), and the flesh which is nothing but sin (Romans 7:18). These two natures, the flesh and the spirit, are constantly at war with one another so long as we live in this world.

When God saves a sinner, he does not renovate, repair, and renew the old nature. He creates a new nature in his elect. Our old, Adamic, fallen, sinful nature is not changed. The flesh is subdued by the spirit; but it will never surrender to the spirit. The spirit wars against the flesh; but it will never improve the flesh. The flesh is sinful. The flesh is cursed. Thank God, the flesh must die! But it will never be improved.

This dual nature of the believer is plainly taught in the Word of God. It is utterly impossible to honestly interpret the 5th chapter of Galatians, the 7th chapter of Romans, and 1st John 3 without concluding that both Paul and John teach that there is within every believer, so long as he lives in this world, both an old Adamic

nature that can do nothing but sin and a new righteous nature, that which is born of God, that cannot sin, that can only do righteousness.

The Holy Spirit's work in sanctification is not the improvement of our old nature, but the maturing of the new, steadily causing the believer to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and bring forth fruit unto God.

Every believer knows the duality of his nature by painful, bitterly painful experience. Ask any child of God what he desires above all things, and he will quickly reply, "That I may live without sin in perfect conformity to Christ, perfectly obeying the will of God in all things." But that which we most greatly desire is an utter impossibility in this life.

Is it not so with you? Though you delight in the law of God after the inward man, there is another law of evil in your members, warring against you. You would do good; but evil is always present with you, so that you cannot do the things you would. Even your best, noblest, most sincere acts of good, when honestly evaluated, are so marred by sin in motive and in execution that you must confess, "All my righteousnesses are filthy rags!"

It is this warfare between the flesh and the spirit more than anything else that keeps the believer from being satisfied with life in this world. Blessed be God, we shall soon be free! When we have dropped this robe of flesh, we shall be perfectly conformed to the image of him who loved us and gave himself for us! Yet, the Lord God reckons us righteous, absolutely and perfectly righteous before him; and, what is more, he tells us to reckon ourselves to be what he reckons us to be in Christ (Romans 5:9-11; 6:11; 1 Peter 4:1).

Rewarded Righteousness

Here is the *sixth* aspect of righteousness revealed in this blessed Book. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to get hold of it and live in the joyous prospect of it until it, at last, comes to pass. — Every sinner who trusts Christ as his Savior, being made the righteousness of God in him, shall be rewarded for his perfect righteousness with everlasting glory in heaven.

In the last day, every believer shall enter into heaven and obtain the inheritance of everlasting glory; and that will be righteousness rewarded. Immediately after the resurrection we must all be judged by God, according to the record of our works (Revelation 20:12-13). — "*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). The Judge before whom we must stand is the God-man, whom we have crucified (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10). We will be judged out of the books, according to the record of God's strict justice. And this is God's declaration.

"In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and *there shall be* none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jeremiah 50:20)

The question is often raised, "Will God judge his elect for their sins and failures committed after they were saved and expose them in the Day of Judgment?" The only reason that question is ever raised is because many retain a remnant of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, by which they hope to hold over God's saints the whip and terror of the law.

There is absolutely no sense in which those who trust Christ shall ever be made to pay for their sins! Our sins were imputed to Christ and shall never be imputed to us again (Romans 4:8). Christ paid our debt to God's law and justice; and God will never require us to pay. God, who has blotted out our transgressions, will never write them again. He who covered our sins will never uncover them!

Those who are found perfectly righteous, righteous according to the record of God himself, shall enter into eternal life and inherit everlasting glory with Christ. Because we have in Christ done good, nothing but good, perfect good, without any spot of sin, wrinkle of iniquity, or trace of transgression, we shall enter into life everlasting, because we are worthy to enter in (Revelation 22:11).

Who are these perfectly righteous ones? They are all who are saved by God's free and sovereign grace in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 8:1, 32-34). Heaven was earned and purchased for all God's elect by Christ. We were predestined to obtain our inheritance from eternity (Ephesians 1:11). Christ has taken possession of heaven's glory as our Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Our Savior gave all the glory he earned as our Mediator to all his elect (John 17:5, 20). And in Christ every believer is worthy of heaven's glory (Colossians 1:12).

Glorification shall be but the consummation of salvation; and salvation is by grace alone. That means no part of heaven's bliss and glory is the reward of our works, but all the reward of God's free grace in Christ. All spiritual blessings are ours from eternity in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), and all shall be ours in and with him forever.

Christ is our Righteousness. He is that righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. And, if we trust him, he is ours. Because his righteousness is ours, we shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. He is that Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. If we believe on the Son of God, that Holiness is ours, and we shall see the Lord our God face to face in Christ. Then, (O blessed day!) he shall wipe all tears from our eyes forever!

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Revelation 21:1-5)

“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.” (Revelation 22:3-6)

Chapter 109
The Conviction of Judgment

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” (John 16:7-11)

Judgment Finished

Looking upon my own heart, in the light of God’s Word, I am thoroughly convinced of my own depravity, guilt, and sin before God. I know that I deserve his infinite wrath. Looking upon that Man in heaven who is God, who was once made to be sin for sinful man, and is now freed from sin, I am thoroughly convinced that his righteousness is infinitely meritorious and sufficient to give all who trust him eternal, immutable acceptance with the holy God. And looking upon Christ’s conquest over Satan by his death upon the cursed tree, I am thoroughly convinced of judgment, convinced that judgment is finished for all for whom this great and glorious Savior died at Calvary. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. When he saves a sinner, he convinces him of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. This conviction of judgment is threefold.

1. **God will judge all sin** (Acts 17:31). As the Lord God judged Satan for sin, casting him out of heaven, binding him by the cross of Christ and sentencing him to everlasting destruction in hell, so he will judge the sins of all men and women in the last day. None shall escape the justice and wrath of almighty God. — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20; John 3:36; Romans 6:23).
2. **God’s judgment of men for sin is just.** Sin is more than an act. It is enmity against God in the heart of every man (Romans 8:7). It is treason against the King of heaven and malice against our Creator. The goodness and justice of God demand that wickedness be put out of the earth and that sinners be punished with everlasting destruction (Psalm 11:4-7). Should God punish me forever in hell, he is perfectly just to do so. Should he punish you forever in hell, he is just. We deserve eternal damnation.
3. **But, blessed be his name forever, for God’s elect, judgment is over!** The Lord God judged the sins of his elect in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He made his dear Son to be sin for us and punished us for sin, to the full satisfaction of his holy justice, in his darling Son (2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

The proof that judgment is over for the believer is the fact that Christ has taken Satan into captivity, delivering us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you have nothing to fear from God, his law, or his justice. Your sins are forever forgiven. You have been made perfectly righteous in Christ. You are complete in him. And for you, judgment is over. Because Christ died, *“there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared!”* Because Christ is risen from the dead and seated in heaven, we are assured that he has obtained eternal redemption, even the forgiveness of sin for all his chosen. Believing him we are assured that this blessed forgiveness is ours. Behold the risen Savior, and rejoice (1 Peter 4:1-2). Judgment is over because Christ died in our stead and judged the prince of this world as our Substitute (Revelation 20:1-6; Romans 8:1-4, 33-39).

Who shall charge us with sin? No one can. Nothing can. Satan cannot, he is defeated. The world cannot, it is condemned. The law cannot, it is honored. God in justice cannot. Justice is satisfied. — *“It is God that justifieth”* (Romans 8:33). The word *“justifieth”* is in the present, linear tense, not because justification is continually being accomplished, but because it is forever efficacious and continually revealed and applied to our hearts as we look to Christ (1 John 1:9). God declares that we are perfectly righteous in Christ continually. He will never charge us with sin. — *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin!”*

Who shall condemn us? No one can. Nothing can. — “*It is Christ that died*” (Romans 8:34). It is impossible that one of Christ’s sheep should ever perish, because Christ died in our place. He was raised again for our justification. He finished the work of our redemption and sat down in heaven. Christ himself intercedes for us in glory (1 John 2:1-2).

Who shall separate us? No one can. Nothing can. No power, no being, and no act of men, of Satan, or of the demons of hell can separate us from the Savior’s love. Read Romans 8:35-39 and rejoice! No earthly trouble can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus; and no spiritual trouble, nothing in heaven, nothing in earth, nothing in us, nothing in time, nothing in eternity can do so! The purpose of God must stand. The blood of Christ shall never lose its power. The seal of the Spirit cannot be broken. The promise of God cannot fail. — Blessed security!

Future Judgment

When God the Holy Spirit gives us faith in Christ he convinces us that judgment is finished, that Christ has satisfied all the justice of God as our Substitute. Still, because we are all constantly subjected to the notions of false religion, because we are constantly bombarded with works religion by family, friends, foes, and preachers, questions about judgment still arise and sometimes trouble God’s saints.

- What about the judgment seat of Christ?
- What about the Great White Throne Judgment?
- What about our sins after God has saved us?

Because these things trouble many, I must directly address the matter of future judgment. Here are two specific passages that are troubling to some of God’s saints (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Revelation 20:11-15).

(2 Corinthians 5:10-11) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

(Revelation 20:11-15) And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Some time ago I received a letter from one of God’s saints that expressed a concern and a matter of much confusion to many. She asked, “Will there be one judgment or two? Will we be judged first by Christ for our sin and second for our works as believers?” Understand the Word of God. — Judgment is finished because Christ Jesus our Lord, in his death and resurrection as our Substitute, crushed the serpent’s head forever.

While the Word of God constantly warns the wicked of the terror of divine judgment and the everlasting wrath of God, the Day of Judgment is never described as a terror to the believer, or even a thing to be dreaded by us. Rather, for the believer, the Day of Judgment is always set forth as a matter of anticipated joy and glory.

On this earth God’s saints are constantly misjudged. His servants are maligned and slandered by reprobate men. But in that last great day, God almighty will vindicate his people and he will vindicate his

servants (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). I do not dread that day. I'm looking forward to it; and I do so with peace. If, as a believer, a sinner saved by God's free and sovereign grace, through the sin-atonement blood and perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand what the Bible says about that great day, you will look forward to it, too. With those things in mind, let's see what the Bible teaches about the Great White Throne Judgment.

A Gospel Revelation

First, here is a gospel revelation: — The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. Do not concern yourself about the signs of the times and those things that men imagine are indications of the last days. There is very little, if anything, of spiritual value to be gained by studying all the books ever written on prophetic issues. They all have to be rewritten as soon as the predicted events have failed to come to pass. We are never commanded to look for signs of our Lord's coming. We are commanded to be looking for him to come. Get this one blessed fact fixed in your mind — Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, the Son of God, is coming again!

The Son of God is personally coming again to this earth (Acts 1:9-11). That very same God-man who was born at Bethlehem, who lived as our Representative, and died as our sin-atonement Substitute on the cross is coming to this earth again. He said, *"I will come again!"* (John 14:3). The Apostle Paul wrote, *"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven!"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16). He said, *"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven!"* (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

"I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." (Job 19:25-27)

He came once in weakness. He is coming again in power. He came once in humiliation. He is coming again in glory. He came once to be despised. He is coming again to be admired. He came once to suffer. He is coming again to conquer.

The second coming of Christ will be sudden, unannounced, unexpected, and climatic. — *"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night"* (1 Thessalonians 5:2). — Our Lord said, *"I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee"* (Revelation 3:3). The Lord does not tell us to look for the tribulation, or the regathering of Israel, or the rebuilding of a Jewish temple. He tells us to look for him. If you look for signs, and times, and seasons, you will be shocked when Christ comes. The only thing mentioned in the Book of God that will announce the Lord's coming will be *"a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16).¹

Our Lord Jesus may appear at any moment. — *"Behold, he cometh!"* (Revelation 1:7) Always look for him on the tiptoe of faith and expectation. All will be taken by surprise except those who are expecting him to appear. Like those Thessalonians who believed God, we must constantly *"wait for his Son from heaven"* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Faith is ever *"looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13). Christ is coming. Soon he shall appear. When the Son of God appears, he will bring with him a crown of righteousness, immortality, and life for all who love him and look for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12).

A General Resurrection

¹ No man knows the day or hour of our Lord's coming; and that is best (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). If we knew the day or hour, we would become irresponsible and negligent with regard to our daily duties. Do not seek to know when Christ is coming. Be content with his promise, and wait for his appearing.

Second, when Christ comes, there will be a great, general resurrection of all who have ever lived upon the earth (Revelation 20:13; John 5:28-29). I offer no argument or proof for what I am about to state. I simply declaring to you the plain facts, as they are revealed in Holy Scripture. Those who rebel against them, mock them, despise them, or ignore them do so to their own eternal ruin. But I assure you that the Son of God is coming again; and when he comes, there will be a resurrection of the dead.

First, all who have died in faith shall be raised from the grave. All will be raised; but the saints of God will have distinct priority in the resurrection. — *“The dead in Christ shall rise first.”* The bodies of God’s saints (all the Old Testament saints, all the martyrs, all who have died before the Lord’s second coming) shall be raised from their graves and reunited with their souls (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Then, immediately after the sleeping saints arise, all believers living upon the earth shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-58). As our Lord descends in the brilliant glory of his second advent, we shall go out to meet him and return with him, as he comes with all his saints to burn up the earth, destroy the wicked, and make all things new. — What a day that will be!

Then, after the Son of God has gathered all the ransomed bodies of his elect from the earth, after he has destroyed all the wicked with the brightness of his coming, all the wicked shall be raised. Yes, there is a resurrection for the wicked, too. But, for those who believe not, there is no music in the resurrection. The Lord himself shall issue a summons they cannot resist. They will stand in terror before him whose grace they have despised, against whom they have sinned.

Their bodies and souls, now united in sin, shall be united in horror. There is not one word of comfort for you who will not bow to the claims of Christ. If you die without Christ, you die without hope and without peace. Your resurrection shall be a resurrection of damnation!

A Great Reckoning

Third, immediately after the resurrection, we must all be judged by God according to the record of our works (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12-13). The Judge before whom we must stand is the God-man, whom we have crucified (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

We will be judged out of the books, according to the record of God’s strict justice. When the books are opened, what shocks of terror will seize the hearts and souls of those who have no righteousness and no atonement before the holy Lord God! With the opening of the books, every crime, every offense, every sin you have ever committed, in mind, in heart, and in deed shall be exposed to your fully awakened and utterly terrified conscience. This is what Daniel saw in his prophetic vision. — *“Judgment was set; and the books were opened”* (7:10)

I realize that this is figurative language. God does not need books to remember man’s sins. However, as John Gill wrote, “This judgment out of the books and according to works, is designed to show with what accuracy and exactness, with what justice and equity, it will be executed, in allusion to statute-books in courts of judicature”.

In the Scriptures God is often represented as writing and keeping books. And according to these books we all shall be judged. What are the books? — The Book of Divine Omniscience (Malachi 3:5) — The Book of Divine Remembrance (Malachi 3:16) — The Book of Creation (Romans 1:18-20) — The Book of God’s Providence (Romans 2:4-5) — The Book of God’s holy Law (Romans 2:12; Exodus. 20:3-17) — The Book of the Gospel (Romans 2:16) — The Book of Conscience (Romans 2:15)

But, blessed be God, there are some against whom no crimes, no sins, no offenses can be found, not even by the omniscient eye of God himself! — *“In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve”* (Jeremiah 50:20). Their names are found in another book, a book which God himself wrote and sealed before the worlds were made. It is the Book of Life. In this book there is a record of divine election, the name of a divine Surety, a record of perfect righteousness (Jeremiah. 23:6; 33:16), a record of complete satisfaction by blood atonement, and the promise of eternal life.

The question is often raised, “Will God judge his elect for their sins and failures, committed after they were saved, and expose them in the Day of Judgment?” — The only reason that question is ever raised is because many try to retain the threat and fear of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, by which they hope to hold over God’s saints the whip and terror of the law.

But there is absolutely no sense in which you who trust the Lord Jesus Christ shall ever be made to pay for your sins. Our sins were imputed to Christ and shall never be imputed to us again (Romans 4:8). Christ paid our debt to God’s law and justice; and God will never require us to pay. God who has blotted out our transgressions will never write them again. He who covered our sins will never uncover them. And the perfect righteousness of Christ is our righteousness.

On the Day of Judgment, God’s elect are never represented as having done any evil, but only good (Matthew 25:31-40). The Day of Judgment will be a day of glory and bliss for Christ and his people, not a day of mourning and sorrow. It will be a marriage supper, at which Christ will glory in his Church, and our triune God will display the glory of his grace in us. At that great day, at that marriage supper, we will glory in God our Savior.

A Glorious Reward

Fourth, those who are found perfectly righteous, righteous according to the records of God himself, shall enter into eternal life and inherit everlasting glory with Christ. They that have done good, nothing but good, perfect good, without any spot of sin, wrinkle of iniquity, or trace of transgression, shall enter into everlasting life. It is written, *“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still”* (Revelation 22:11).

Who are these perfectly righteous ones? None are so by nature, and none are made righteous by any works of their own. These righteous ones are all God’s elect, all the redeemed, all the called, all the justified, all who trust the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1, 32-34)

Though there shall be degrees of punishment for the wicked in hell because there are degrees of wickedness, there shall be no degrees of reward and glory among the saints in heaven because there are no degrees of redemption and righteousness. Heaven was earned and purchased for all God’s elect by Christ (Hebrews 9:12). We were predestined to obtain our inheritance from eternity (Ephesians 1:11). Christ has taken possession of heaven’s glory as our Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Our Savior gave all the glory he earned as our Mediator to all his elect (John 17:5, 20). And in Christ every believer is worthy of heaven’s glory (Colossians 1:12). Glorification is but the consummation of salvation; and salvation is by grace alone!

That means that no part of heaven’s bliss and glory is the reward of our works, but all the reward of God’s free grace in Christ. All spiritual blessings are ours from eternity in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). And that with which God blessed us in Christ before the world began, he will not take from us when this world is no more (Romans 11:29). God will do all that's necessary to bring us to Heaven; and when we get there, he will say to us, *“well done good and faithful servant!”*

That is the conviction of judgment set before us in the Book of God. May God the Holy Spirit give it to you by the might and mercy of his irresistible grace.

A Grand Restitution

Fifth, I must warn you who are yet without Christ, if you will not trust Christ, you must be forever damned! All who are found guilty of sin in that great and terrible Day of Judgment shall be cast into the lake of fire and there be made to suffer the unmitigated wrath of almighty God forever!

One by one the Lord God will call you before his throne and judge you. As he says to you, “*Depart ye cursed!*” He will say to his holy angels, “*Take him! Bind him! Cast him into outer darkness!*” There will be no mercy for you. There will be no pity for you. There will be no sorrow for you. There will be no hope for you. There will be no end for you.

To hell you deserve to go! To hell you must go! To hell you will go! Unless you flee to Christ and take refuge in him, in that great day the wrath of God shall seize you and destroy you forever! I beseech you now, by the mercies of God, be reconciled to God by trusting his darling Son. — “*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*” Come to Christ now. Eternity is before you. Behold his infinite love (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Behold his finished atonement (2 Corinthians 5:21). Behold his amazing, almighty, saving grace (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 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. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

In that great and terrible day I hope to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, but having his righteousness. How will it be for you in that day?

Chapter 110

The Lord's Prayer

“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.” (John 17:1-26)

In these 26 verses of Holy Scripture we have the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, as he was about to enter into the Holy of Holies in Heaven, with his own blood, to obtain eternal redemption for his people.

Our blessed Savior left us the full text of this prayer. He prayed frequently while he was here on the earth in our flesh; but this is the only prayer of our Lord Jesus that is recorded in its entirety. This is Christ our God-man Mediator, our great High Priest, praying to the heavenly Father on our behalf, interceding for us. He left us the full text of this prayer as an example of his intercession, which even now he carries on for his people at the Father's right hand.

The Scripture says that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and was buried and raised again that he ascended to Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us. There he prays or makes intercession for his people. This prayer is the prayer of our High Priest, our Mediator, which he is praying for us at this moment, as he makes intercession for us in heaven (Romans 8:34).

In Hebrews 7:25, we read that, “*He is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*” So, this is the prayer of the great High Priest, the one Mediator between God and men. The Scripture says, “*There is one God and one Mediator,*” one who prays for us and only one. That is our Lord Jesus Christ. This is his effectual prayer of intercession.

It is the Lord Jesus himself who is praying here. The fact that he prayed, prayed often, and prayed earnestly ought to encourage us to pray (Hebrews 4:14-16). Prayer doesn't change God or change the will of God. It finds the will of God. Prayer not only finds the will of God, it bows us to the will of God. Prayer rejoices in the will of God and changes us, causing us to know and to follow the will of God. If our Master prayed, his servants certainly ought to pray.

Three Statements

In John 16:28 the Lord Jesus summed up his life and ministry, his person and work, in three plain and simple statements. Look at them.

1. “*I came forth from the Father.*” — Who is this man, who declares that he came forth from God the Father? That declaration certainly indicates at least these two things about who he is: *First*, if he came forth from the Father, he must have been with the Father and in the Father (John 1:1, 18). *Second*, if he came forth from the Father, he must have been sent by the Father for a specific purpose, to accomplish a specific work (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:5-10).
2. “*I am come into the world.*” — He is not of this world, but came into this world. How did he come into this world? He came through the womb of a virgin, by supernatural, divine intervention. The Son of God came into this world by incarnation, conceived in the womb of the virgin, and brought forth into the world by the power of God the Holy Spirit. The eternal God assumed into union with himself our nature. God came into the world as a man (Philippians 2:5-7).

Why did he come into this world? He came here to redeem and save his people, to put away our sins, to justify and sanctify us by his own life's blood, which he poured out to God as a sin-atonement sacrifice for us (Galatians 4:4-6).

What did he do while he was in this world? He did what he came to do. He brought in everlasting righteousness for us by his obedience to the Father (Romans 5:19) and satisfied the law and justice of God for our sins by his death as our Substitute (Romans 3:24-26). The Lord Jesus Christ effectually redeemed his people from their sins and delivered us from the curse of God's holy law (Galatians 3:13).

3. *“Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”* — He must have completed what he came here to do. Otherwise, he would not have left. If upon his leaving the world he went to the Father, from whom he was sent, it is evident that the work he was sent here to do was finished and that the Father approved of and accepted him, his work, and his people (Hebrews 10:11-14).

The Book of Hebrews begins with these same three facts, facts that define the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. — *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our sin-atonement Sacrifice and Substitute, by whom our redemption has been accomplished. He is our great High Priest who makes intercession to the Father for those people he has redeemed. And he is our almighty Savior, by whom grace is conveyed to us, and by whom we shall be carried into the very glory of heaven itself. Perhaps the best commentary on who Christ is, what he did, why he did it, and where he is now is to be found here in John 17 in his high priestly prayer, that great prayer which he made to God the Father for us just before he went forth to the cross to accomplish our redemption.

Four Requests

In this seventeenth chapter of John our great High Priest makes four mighty requests, requests which the Father cannot deny. Not one of these requests can be denied, because they are made upon the basis of Christ's finished work. Really, these four requests are more than requests. They are the claims of Christ, our sovereign Redeemer, claims made by him when he had finished the work the Father gave him to do. They teach us much about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorify Me

His first request is this: — *“And now, O Father, glorify Thou me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”* (v.5). That is the request that he makes as our mighty Mediator and Substitute. This is not just an ambition for personal exaltation. It is a prayer for power and dominion as a man for the salvation of chosen men. And the basis of the request is his fulfillment of all the stipulations of the covenant of grace by him as specified in verses 1-4.

Verse 1 — *“These words spake Jesus* (the words spoken to his disciples in the preceding chapters), *and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come* (the hour he so often spoke of, the hour for which the world was made, the hour for which he came into the world); *glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.”* — As the Son of God, he needed no glory to be given to him; but he is here praying as our Mediator, as a man. He is here praying that God the Father would uphold and sustain him in the work he was about to accomplish upon the cursed tree, that he might thereby glorify his every attribute.

Verse 2 — *“As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given him.”* — The Father has given the Son, as our Mediator and Savior, all authority, dominion, and power over all flesh (John 3:35; Matthew 28:18). This total, sovereign dominion, power, and authority

belongs to him by divine, eternal decree, both as our Creator and our Redeemer. He is the appointed and rightful Administrator of the Father's will, purpose, and kingdom.

Our Lord Jesus Christ holds and exercises this absolute power so that he may "*give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given him*" (John 6:37-39). This is a very important phrase. Our Lord refers to his people, those given to him by the Father, six times in this prayer (vv. 2, 6, 9, 12, 24).

Verse 3 — "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*" — Eternal life is knowing God in Christ. Eternal life is not a religious experience. Eternal life is not a moral or religious reformation of conduct. Eternal life is spiritual life. It is life given to dead sinners by God the Holy Spirit in sovereign regeneration. Eternal life is not knowing that there is a God, but knowing God. It is having God revealed in you and to you by his Spirit. It is understanding who God is by personal acquaintance (John 14:6-9; 1 John 5:20).

Verse 4 — "*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*" — No one but the Lord Jesus Christ could ever make this claim. Here is a man who literally loved, obeyed, and honored the eternal God all the days of his life. In his life and in his death, our Savior glorified God's law, God's will, God's justice, and God's grace. He did it for us, that God might be both just and the Justifier of his people (Romans 3:24-26).

When our Lord says, "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,*" I have no doubt that he is referring to three things.

1. The righteousness he brought in, established, and finished for his people by his perfect life (Jeremiah 23:6).
2. The redemption he was about to accomplish and finish at Calvary (John 19:30).
3. The kingdom he shall at last finish when he has given eternal life to all that the Father gave to him from eternity (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Hebrews 2:13).

It is upon the basis of this finished work that our Savior prays, "*And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*" (v. 5).

Keep My People

Second, in verses 6-19 our Savior makes this great request for his people: — "*And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are*" (v. 11). — His prayer is this: Father, preserve and keep my believing people; but notice how the Son of God describes his believing people. Here are twelve (12) things which are true of all God's people in this world.

1. Believers are men and women to whom God almighty has been made known.

Verse 6 — "*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.*" — God's name is his character, his attributes. His name is who he is. It is written, — "*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" That simply means, whosoever shall believe God, worship God, trust God, as he has manifested and revealed himself in Christ shall be saved. His name is...

- Jehovah-jireh (Genesis 22:13-14 "*The Lord will Provide*").
- Jehovah-rapha (Exodus 15:26 "*The Lord that Healeth Thee*").
- Jehovah-nissi (Exodus 17:8-15 "*The Lord our Banner*").
- Jehovah-mkadesh (Exodus 31:13 "*The Lord that Sanctifieth Thee*").

- Jehovah-shalom (Judges 6:24 *“The Lord our Peace”*).
- Jehovah-ra-ah (Psalm 23:1 *“The Lord is my Shepherd”*).
- Jehovah-tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6 *“The Lord our Righteousness”*).
- Jehovah-shammah (Ezekiel 48:35 *“The Lord is There”*).

2. Believers know that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Verse 7 — *“Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.”* — We recognize that the Father and the Son are one. We know that everything Christ did and said, and everything he shall yet do is of God the Father. This is the confidence we must have. It is the confidence we do have (2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Acts 17:30-31).

3. Believers are people who receive the Word of God and, receiving the Word of God, know who Jesus Christ is, the Sent One of God in whom is all our hope and all our salvation.

Verse 8 — *“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”*

4. Believers are sinners chosen by God the Father in eternity and given to Christ in effectual grace as the special objects of his mercy, love, and grace.

Verse 9 — *“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”* — Everything Christ has done, is doing, and shall hereafter do is for his people. To speak of God’s love as universal love for all men is to make God’s love utterly meaningless. God loves his elect. Christ redeemed his elect. The Holy Spirit calls, regenerates, and keeps his elect. Everything God does in providence and in grace is for his elect (Romans 8:28).

5. Believers are those men and women in whom the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified.

Verse 10 — *“And all mine are Thine, and Thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”* — Christ is glorified by his own operations of grace for us and in us, our faith in and obedience to him, and by our final, consummate salvation and everlasting glory by him (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; 2:7; Revelation 5:9-13).

6. Believers are kept in life, grace, and faith in Christ.

Verses 11-12 — *“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”* — God’s saints are here described as a people in the world, in hostile enemy territory, kept by God’s grace and power, and united as one body in Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6).

7. Believers are those who shall have Christ’s joy fulfilled in themselves.

Verse 13 — *“And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”* — This joy is the Joy of his grace (1 John 1:3-4) and the joy of his salvation (John 16:20; Hebrews 12:1-2). — *“Your sorrow shall be turned into joy!”*

8. Believers are, because of their faith, the objects of the world’s hatred.

Verse 14 — *“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”* — The gospel we believe, the Savior we serve, the God we worship is despised by this world.

9. Believers are left in this world to preach the gospel amid much evil and under the relentless assault of the evil one.

Verse 15 — *“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”* — Let nothing hinder faithful obedience to Christ. Our God will keep us from evil and from the evil one!

10. Believers are sinners who have been sanctified (set apart and distinguished from the world) by the Word and truth of God.

Verses 16-17 — *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”*

11. Every believer, every child of God is sent into this world as the servant of God almighty to do his will, glorify his name, and serve the interests of his Kingdom.

Verse 18 — *“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”*

12. You and I, God’s elect, sinners who trust the Lord Jesus Christ, are the special objects of all that the Lord Jesus Christ came to do.

Verse 19 — *“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”* — The Son of God set himself apart to be a sin offering that we might be sanctified by hearing and believing the Gospel. Our sanctification is threefold. We are sanctified by God the Father in election (Jude 1), God the Son in redemption (1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 10:10), and God the Holy Ghost in regeneration (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13), through the instrumentality of the Word of God.

Save My Redeemed

Third, in verse 20-23, our Savior turned his attention specifically to us, his people who were yet to be saved. His prayer is this: Father, save my redeemed ones.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

Give Me My Reward

Then, in verses 24-26, the Lord Jesus prays, Father, give me the reward of my labor.

“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: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Soon, our Savior's prayer shall be fully answered. He will have all his people with him in glory; and we shall have his joy fulfilled in us. In that great, blessed, glorious day, our sorrow shall be turned into joy; and our joy shall be full!

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” (Revelation 21:3-7)

Chapter 111
“This is Life Eternal”

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

When Moses approached the burning bush, the Lord God said to him, “*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground*” (Exodus 3:5). That is exactly how I feel every time I read, or attempt to preach from the 17th chapter of John. This is The Lord’s Prayer, the intercessory prayer of our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. As he anticipated his death upon the cross, the glorious consummation of his obedience to God as our Substitute, these are the words he spoke to God the Father on our behalf.

“*Father, the hour is come.*” — The hour he is talking about is the hour of his death, the hour of our redemption, the hour for which the world was made.

“*Glorify thy Son.*” — He elaborates on this in verse 5. “*Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*” Exalt me to your throne; give me the dominion over all things; magnify me as Lord over all and King forever; give me pre-eminence.

“*That thy Son also may glorify thee.*” — Give me the rule of the world as the Mediator of my people, as their Head and Representative, that I may save all the people of your love, all elect sinners, for the everlasting praise, honor, and glory of your name. We know this is the meaning of verse 1 because he says so in verse 2.

“*As thou hast given him power over all flesh.*” — This power was given to Christ our Surety in the covenant of grace, as the result of his pledged obedience unto death. When he finished the work of redemption and ascended back into heaven, the Triune Jehovah turned over to him, the God-man, our Redeemer, the reins of the universe, — “*power over all flesh.*”

“*That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*” — The purpose of Christ’s exaltation, power, and dominion is that he might, by the power of his omnipotent grace, give eternal life to chosen sinners, redeemed by his blood.

Begins Here

Eternal life, in the experience and knowledge of it, begins here on earth. Though it is eternal (without beginning or end), it begins in us as soon as we are born again. When you trust Christ, you receive from him the same life that you shall have throughout eternity, — His life! It is “*Christ in you, the Hope of Glory!*”

The life of a new born child of God, who has just a moment ago begun to call upon the name of the Lord, is the very same life that is possessed by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, who have been in heaven for thousands of years. Eternal life is like a mighty river. It deepens and widens as it flows. But it is the same river which began when Christ, the Water of Life, first sprang up in your soul. We “*grow in grace,*” but you’ve got to have life to grow. “*We see through a glass darkly:*” but we do see. And you’ve got to have life to see. It is true, we only “*know in part;*” but we do know. And you’ve got to have life to know.

When the believer dies, he does not suddenly enter into a new life. Death simply rids us of this cumbersome body of flesh, the body of sin, the old nature, which hampers our enjoyment of life. When we drop this body of flesh, then we shall fully enjoy eternal life, the life of Christ imparted to us in the new birth (Romans 7:24-25).

Eternal life begins here, in the new birth. It is not something awaiting us in heaven. It is “*Christ in you!*” To have eternal life is to be made, by the grace of God, a “*partaker of the divine nature.*” It is to have Christ formed in you.

God’s Gift

This eternal life is the gift of God the Father! — “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23). — “*This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*” (1 John 5:11). We were born in spiritual death. We deserve eternal death. But God has decreed and promised to give chosen sinners eternal life.

This eternal life is the purchase of God the Son! — “*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). — “*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). With his own blood, the Lord Jesus entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal life for us. Our Savior said, “*I am come that they might have life!*” (John 10:10). — “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*” (1 Peter 3:18).

“Living, He loved me,
Dying, He saved me,
Buried, He carried my sins far away,
Rising, He justified freely forever!”

This eternal life is the work of God the Holy Spirit. — “*It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63). Eternal life is bestowed upon helpless, dead sinners by the sovereign, irresistible work of God the Holy Spirit (John 1:11-13; 3:3-8).

Given to God’s Elect

This eternal life, the gift of the Father, the purchase of the Son, the work of the Spirit, is given by Christ to all those the Father gave to him in the everlasting covenant of grace. Eternal life is the gift of the Triune God to his elect.

Our Savior is not a beggar, waiting for you to let him come into your heart. He is the almighty, sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords! He is not in your hands. You’re in his hands! He says, “*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*” (Matthew 28:18). — “*Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*” There are many who have been given to Christ from eternity, whom he must and will save (John 6:37-40). All whom Christ had given to him in eternity he will give eternal life in time (John 10:24-28). The evidence and proof of a person’s election in eternity is the gift of eternal life in time (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; Acts 13:48).

What is it?

“*And this is life eternal.*” What is it? What is eternal life? Can it be defined? Can it be described? Hear what the Son of God says, — “*This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*” Eternal life is the knowledge of God in Christ.

Knowing God

Eternal life is knowing the Lord God, the only true God. Before Adam sinned, he knew God. He walked in God's presence and talked with God, as a man talks with his own familiar friend. But when he fell, Adam lost everything. He lost life. He lost righteousness. He lost all light regarding all things relating to and about God. He lost the knowledge of God. He lost peace.

No man by nature knows or can know God. Our Lord said, "*Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*" (Matthew 11:27). — "*Ye neither know me, nor my Father*" (John 8:19). All men think they know God, and know all about God; but no man by nature knows God!

Yet, man must have a god. As a dog must have a master, so man must have a god; and he will find a god of some kind. Man's ignorance of God has led him into every imaginable form of idolatry and superstition. There is hardly a creature, a power, or an element of nature that man has not worshiped as god! All men by nature "*worship and serve the creature more than the Creator*" (Romans 1:25). And the more educated and brilliant a man is the more ridiculous and base is his idolatry (Acts 17:22-23)

Man's ignorance of God is such that he always rejects light and chooses darkness, and turns from the truth of God to vain philosophy, heathen superstition, and religious tradition. Did not our Savior tell the Pharisees this? — "*I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another come in his own name, him ye will receive*" (John 5:43). — "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord*" (Isaiah 55:8). The wisdom of God is foolishness to man. — "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,*" and he pursues it with all his heart, "*but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12).

What is it to know the only true God? Knowing God is not just having a god. Everybody has a god. Our Lord says eternal life is knowing the only true God. Knowing God is not just believing that there is a God. Whether they acknowledge it or not, everybody believes that there is a God. To Know God, the only true God, is to know him as God.

Who is God? He is the great, infinite, invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal Jehovah, who made heaven and earth (Isaiah 45:12). He is God, the incomprehensible Trinity (1 John 5:7).

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "I would not worship a god that I could fully understand...If I could put my religion in my pocket, like a box of lozenges, I should soon suck it all away!" There is in God an infinite depth of mystery, an infinite height of wonder, an infinite wideness of fulness that no man can comprehend. He is God who "*upholds all things by the Word of his power!*" He is God "*who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will!*" He is God "*in whom we live, and move, and have our being!*" He is God who reigns everywhere, over all things, "*who doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth,*" whose will and power no man can resist!

To know the only true God is to know him as my God! The God I have just described is God to me! God is great. God is sovereign. God is good. God is holy. God is just. And, blessed be His name, God is mine! I bow before his throne. I am aware of his presence. I worship him with reverence and awe. I believe him. I trust his Word and love his law. I trust his Son.

To know the only true God is to know him as my Father! — "*Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba (Father!) Father!*" (Romans 8:15). We pray to "*our Father which art in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9). My Father is one whom I both trust and obey, one whom I both love and fear! I am conscious of his power and his peace, his righteousness and his redemption, his justice and his mercy. If God almighty is my Father, all is well, always! You may strip me, but I'll still be clothed in his righteousness. You may put me in prison, but I'll still be free in Christ. You may pluck out my eyes, but I'll still see his glory. You may cut out my tongue, but I'll still sing his praise. You may forsake me, but I'm never alone. I may be sick in body, but it is

well with my soul. I may be pressed under the load of a thousand cares, but all will work together for my good. I may be at death's door, but it will lead me into his everlasting presence!

To know the only true God is to have a life worth living. Before I knew him, I cursed the day of my birth, but now I thank him for a life to live. Before I knew him, I felt like a galley slave pulling his oars for no reason, with no future; but knowing him I have a reason for life and see a reason for every event in life. If I didn't know God, I would be in utter confusion regarding life and death, heaven and hell, justice and mercy; but in Christ I see his wisdom in all things. If I didn't know God, I would tremble at the prospect of old age, sickness, and death; but knowing him, I face these realities with peace. If I didn't know God, there would be no joy for today, no satisfaction with yesterday, and no hope for tomorrow. To those who do not know God, the future is a blank. They call themselves "agnostics;" and they name themselves well. An agnostic is a person who knows nothing! But the man who knows God knows him "*of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things!*" — "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent!*"

Knowing God in Christ

Eternal life is knowing the only true God, as he is revealed in Jesus Christ, his Son. Eternal life is knowing God in Christ. Many foolishly talk about knowing God in many mysterious ways, in what they call, "mystical, spiritual experiences." But that is all nonsense.

To know God apart from Christ would not be life eternal, for God apart from Christ is an infinitely holy being, whose law I have broken. He could not bless me, whose law I have violated. He could not walk with me, for I am unclean. He could not smile upon me in my sin. But Christ is my Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption. —And I am accepted in him, "*accepted in the Beloved!*"

It would be death, not eternal life, to know God apart from Christ, because the holy, just Lord God must punish sin. He will "*in no wise clear the guilty!*" — "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die!*" But Isaiah 53:5-6 tells me that Christ paid for all my sins. Hebrews 9:26 tells me that he put them all away. Romans 8:32-34 tells me that I am justified and shall never come into condemnation!

It would not be life to know God apart from Christ, for without Christ my body would rot in the grave and never rise again. I must forever die! — "*If Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain...your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). But because he lives we shall live also (John 14:1-3). "*This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent!*"

A Question

How does a sinner get this eternal life, this blessed, living knowledge of God in Christ? You don't get it by nature, but by grace. Eternal life does not come by birth, but by the new birth. It is not by your will, but by God's will. It is not by your works, but by God's work. Eternal life is the gift of God.

Three Essentials

Here are three things that are essential. Apart from these three things no sinner will ever have eternal life.

1. Eternal life must be implanted by grace. As God breathed life into Adam's nostrils and made him a living soul, so God the Holy Spirit must breathe into you the breath of eternal life (John 3:8; Ezekiel 16:8).

2. Eternal life must be revealed by the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit must show you the things of Christ. No one else can. He must reveal your sin to you, the cause of death. He must reveal Christ's precious blood, the price of life!
3. And eternal life must be received by faith in Jesus Christ. I do not say that faith is, in any way, the cause of life. Faith is the result of life. I do not say, if you believe you will live. But I do say, if you live you believe. If you believe on the Son of God, you have eternal life. If you do not trust Christ, you do not have eternal life; you are yet in the gall of bitterness, dead in trespasses and in sin; and the wrath of God is upon you! — *“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).

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to realize the glory of his person. — *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”* God was and is that Man who died at Calvary! In him God and man are reconciled. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to trust the efficacy of his blood. — *“The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin!”* (See — 1 Peter 1:18-20). To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to rest in the merit of his righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to rely upon the power of His intercession! — *“He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him”* (Hebrews 7:25). To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to bow to his sovereign rule as your Lord.

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent!” — *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!”*— Oh, may God the Holy Spirit cause you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Chapter 112
The “I Haves” of Christ

“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”

(John 17:8)

There is nothing written in the Book of God more sacred, more instructive, more comforting, more spiritual than the chapter before us. We have before us John’s inspired record of our Lord’s high priestly prayer for his elect. What a blessed passage of Scripture this is! Here God the Father beheld the perfect, pure devotion of his Son, the Son of his love. Here the disciples heard the most intimate expressions of the Savior’s love for them and for God the Father, as he carried their needs upon his heart to his Father’s heart. Here you and I are allowed to hear the Lord of glory, who loved us and gave himself for us, making intercession for us according to the will of God at the throne of God, intercession based upon the plea of his perfect, infinitely perfect obedience and righteousness.

Unique Prayer

This seventeenth chapter of John is unique. The things spoken here by the Son of God were spoken in the ears of the Father. Yet, they were spoken for the hearts of his people and in their hearing, for their learning and consolation. Indeed, they were spoken and are written here in the Word of God for our hearts’ and souls’ edification in the knowledge of our dear Savior.

That which is written here is written in the language of prayer; but this is a prayer like no other prayer. We pray because we have sinned and because we are sinners, sinners in need of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Our prayers are carried before the throne of God with blushing hearts, filled with shame, contrition, confession, and want. The prayers of our all-glorious Savior were founded upon perfect compliance with his Father’s will in all things.

His Father

This prayer is replete with righteousness, every line bursting with the goodness, grace, and glory of God in Christ. It shows forth the perfect obedience of God the Son to his Father as our Mediator in whom the triune God is revealed and known. There is in the Gospel of John a special manifestation of the tender, dear, precious relation between God the Son and God the Father. Notice how often our Savior uses the endearing name “*Father*” to enrich these sacred pages. As the Father constantly filled his heart, his name seems constantly to flow from his lips....

- 23 Times in Chapter 14.
- 10 Times in Chapter 15.
- 12 Times in Chapter 16.
- 6 Times in Chapter 17.

In verse eleven the Son prays for the Father to keep and preserve his people through his own name, by the power of his name, and for the sake of his name. When he does, he calls him, “*Holy Father*.”

In verse twenty-five, when he speaks of knowing the Father, our Redeemer calls him by that name by which he has ever known and forever knows his Father, the name by which all Spirit taught people know him, saying, “*O righteous Father*.” The world does not and never can know him in his righteous character because he has hidden himself from them (Luke 10:21). But all believers know and love God their Father, first and foremost as their righteous Father because he has in his infinite, sovereign love revealed himself to us in Christ as our righteous Father.

His People

Notice how our Lord distinctly identifies his people to the Father in this prayer. It simply blessed my soul to listen to these terms of grace falling from his lips, as he spoke to his Father and my Father about me. He called us, his elect...

- A Divinely Given People (v. 2).
- A Divinely Kept People (vv. 11-12).
- A Divinely Taught People (v. 14).
- A Divinely Sanctified People (vv. 17-19).
- A Divinely United People (vv. 20-21).
- A Divinely Blessed People (v. 22).
- A Divinely Perfected People (v. 23).
- A Divinely Loved People (v. 23).

Look carefully at John 17:8. — *“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”* We will look at these words in the order in which they are given. May God the Holy Spirit take the things of Christ revealed in this single verse and show them, effectually show them, to all who read these lines.

Know the Son

“For” — The opening word of verse 8, *“For,”* takes us back to verse seven. In verse seven we are told that the sure and certain result of God’s words being communicated to his people by the power and grace of his Spirit and the mediation of his Son is this: — God taught sinners know the Son of God. There is no such thing as a saved sinner who does not know Christ in his true character as the all-glorious Son of God. Is that not what verse seven says? — *“Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.”*

This is a simple fact of Divine Revelation. — Faith without knowledge is nothing but a leap in the dark. It is not salvation. It is not God given faith. True, saving faith involves knowing Christ. — *“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent”* (v. 3). You cannot trust an unknown Savior (Romans 10:13-17).

When God the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us, we know from whom they proceed. They come to us from the Father’s eternal purpose of grace, unfailing and everlasting love, and that covenant of love and grace made for us between the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost before time began (Psalms 25:14).

“The grace of God that bringeth salvation” is effectual, teaching grace. Grace gives us an education which fits us for communion with God, our holy and righteous Father, for it teaches us to worship and adore him as the God of all grace. — God taught sinners know the Son of God. Now, look at the next two words of John 17:8...

Nine I Haves

“I have” — How I love the finality with which our Savior speaks when he talks about what he has done as the God-Man, our Mediator and Surety. He does not say, “I wanted,” “I tried,” or “I desired,” but *“I have!”* It will do our souls good to pause a little while and drink from this deep well. Here are nine *“I haves”* our Savior speaks of in this chapter. What faith, confidence, and encouragement they ought to inspire in believing hearts.

Come my soul, fall down at the feet of this all-glorious Savior and trust him, as a true worshipper, for all things and in all things. Grace was poured into his lips as our covenant Surety before the world began. Here grace pours forth from his lips like a gushing fountain as our covenant Surety who has done all that he said he would do.

1. *“I have glorified thee on the earth”* (v. 4).

Everything he did as a man he did according to the will of God and for the glory of God. When he was but a boy, he went about doing his Father’s business. When he taught us to pray, he taught us to pray for the glory of God. — *“Hallowed be thy name.”* When he was tempted in Gethsemane, he sought the will of God for the glory of God. When he was about to die, he sought only the glory of God (John 12:28).

2. *“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (v. 4).

I never finished anything in my life. He finished everything! When I bow before my Father’s throne, I am compelled to confess, “I have done what I ought never to have done and left undone what I ought always to have done.” — Not my Savior! He says, *“I have finished”* to absolute perfection and completion *“the work which thou gavest me to do.”* He finished his work of establishing righteousness as a man by his perfect obedience. He finished his work of atonement and redemption by his substitutionary sacrifice upon the cursed tree in our place

3. *“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world”* (v. 6).

Christ is the Revelation of the Father, the One in whom and by whom alone God is known. When the Son manifests the Father’s name to chosen sinners, he assures us of our adoption. He makes us to know that God is our Father, that he is our Elder Brother, that God the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, and that Heaven is our home, assuring us that we are *“heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ!”*

4. *“Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled”* (v. 12).

The son of perdition was lost that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Psalms 109:6-8). He was the son of perdition. The sons of God can never be lost. Otherwise the Scriptures could never be fulfilled (John 10:27-28). The purpose of God cannot be nullified. The promise of the Father cannot be broken. The blood of the Son cannot be made of non-effect. The seal of the Spirit cannot be broken. Knowing the glorious efficacy of God’s grace in Christ, we who are the objects of his grace, we who have experienced his grace ought to be able to sing with joy...

In every state we are secure,
The apple of His eye!
All’s well with us while life endures,
And well when called to die!

5. *“I have given them thy Word”* (v. 14).

When our Savior here speaks of the *“word”* of God, he is talking about the whole revelation of God, the whole truth of God. When he talks about the *“words”* of God, he is discussing the many parts which compile the whole. He is describing the many doctrines of Holy Scripture by which the whole truth of God is revealed. *“Word”* means the whole. *“Words”* speak of the many parts that make up the whole. God’s truth is one. Yet, according to his wisdom and prudence, it is revealed in many parts. When our Redeemer says, *“I have given unto them thy Word,”* he is declaring that the whole of the revelation and knowledge of God and his will is in

him and comes from him. More than that, he is telling us that all who are saved by him are made to know the whole truth of God.

He is not telling us that believers know God in the entirety of his Being. No finite creature can know the infinite Creator in the entirety of his Being! But he is telling us that all who are born of God know God entirely, in all his revealed character as God.

- The Righteous God
- The Holy God
- The Just God
- The Sovereign God
- The Saving God

6. *“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world”* (v. 18).

Every child of God, every believer is sent by Christ, not out of the world, not away from the world, but into the world, armed with his Word, his Spirit, and faith in him, to do his will, honor his name, build his kingdom, and spread his Word. As he is God’s anointed Messenger, so we are his anointed messengers. As he was the Father’s Representative, we are his representatives in this world.¹

7. *“And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them”* (v. 22).

Every time I read that text, I think to myself, — “That is just too much for my puny brain to get hold of.” But, oh, how I enjoy trying! This much is certain: — Everything which Christ now possesses as our Mediator, all the glory given to him by his Father as the result of his obedience unto death as our Substitute, he has given to all his people in all its fulness forever!

What a Savior our dear Savior is! He has honored his Father in all things for us. He has proved himself faithful and true in all things as Jehovah’s Righteous Servant, the Steward of his Father’s house, the Trustee of his Father’s will, and the Shepherd of his Father’s sheep. He has saved his people and will continue to save his people until he has no more people to save! He has supplied all our need and will continue to supply all our need until we come to glory land where we shall have no need. He has glorified his people and will continue to glorify his people until all his people have all his glory in all its fulness! — *“Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ!”*

8. *“I have known Thee”* (v. 25).

It is written, *“No man knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”* Yet, here is a Man who says, *“I have known Thee.”*

- His Nature, Perfections, and Glory.
- His Secret Thoughts, Purposes, and Designs.
- His Covenant, Promises, and Blessings.
- His Love, Grace, and Good Will to His People.
- His Whole Mind and Will.

This gives special power and meaning to verse 26.

¹ Godliness is not isolation from the world’s people, but from the world’s ways. We are to live for Christ in this present evil world.

9. *“And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

He who alone knows God has declared to us the mind, purpose, and will of God, so that the very same love the Father has to him may be in us, and that he who is God may himself, in the fulness of his infinite love, manifestly dwell in us forever! That is what I call grace, glorious, free grace!

Go back to verse eight.

Salvation God’s Gift

“I have given!” — How my needy soul delights in those three indescribably enriching words of grace falling from the grace filled lips of our all-glorious Christ! — *“I have given!”* Salvation is the gift of God’s free grace to sinners in and by Christ Jesus. The Son of God stamps these three words of grace upon the whole of God’s salvation and upon every part of it. *“I have given...”*

- Redemption.
- Regeneration.
- Faith.
- Justification.
- Sanctification.
- Preservation.
- Heavenly Glory.

He who gave himself gives all! The gospel of the grace of God does not present an offer of salvation or a proposal of grace, but the gift of God, which is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Look at verse 8 again.

God’s Words

“I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me.” — Carnal, fleshly, human religion feeds upon and rests in signs, symbols, feelings, emotions, and notions. True religion, spiritual religion lives upon the verities, facts, and realities of divine revelation. Most people look for God and grace in their experiences, ceremonies, rituals, visions, and dreams. Believers look for God in his Word. As Thomas Bradbury put it, “God as the Father of his elect, redeemed, and regenerate people is only known in the Son of his love by the Spirit of life and light, and all this only by the words of Jesus Christ.”

It is Christ our Prophet who effectually teaches us by his Spirit and gives us the words of God, causing us to live by them (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). The Lord Jesus gives chosen, redeemed sinners the words of God as words of life (John 6:63). When he sends his Word in effectual, saving power, in the power of his Spirit to his redeemed ones in the time of love, it is to them a Word of life, creating life and faith in them by the power of his Spirit. *“Thou hast the words of eternal life!”* His words are to his own people life-giving words, life-restoring words, and life-preserving words (1 John 1:1; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

To those who believe not, the words of Christ are words of judgment and condemnation (John 8:26-28). It is worth observing that our Lord (by effectual, irresistible, saving grace) gives, sovereignly gives, his words to his people. To the unbelieving and reprobate he merely speaks his words! If the Word of God only comes to your ears, it will be a Word of condemnation and death (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 3:5). Oh, may he be pleased to give you his Word!

That which our Master spoke in John 8 was unacceptable to the Jews, but speak it he must, because these words of God formed a part of his commission which he had received from his Father. He who was and is the Truth knew full well what the consequences of his message would be. Yet, he faithfully declared that which would only add to the guilt and condemnation of those who refused to hear his words.

Our Lord told the Jews that the time would come when they would know him, but only to their eternal sorrow. The words at which they quibbled would be the very words by which they would be forever damned and tormented. Do you understand that?

Faithful men are faithful to the Word of God, no matter what the consequences may be ((2 Corinthians 2:17). You may ridicule, scorn, and reject Christ's words, but you will never get rid of them or even silence them. They will follow you to the judgment seat, and follow you forever through hell (John 12:47-50).

The Saved

Now, read the rest of verse eight. All saved sinners receive God's words, know God's Son, and believe God's revelation of himself in Christ. I have deliberately used the bulk of my space in this study describing the One who saves, because he is infinitely more important than those who are saved by him. But here our Savior speaks about those who are saved by his grace. Here he declares that which is always the result of his saving operations of grace. Whenever God comes in saving power and grace to chosen, redeemed sinners, this is what happens. These words describe saved sinners under these three characteristics. All saved sinners "*receive*" the words of God, "*know*" the Son of God, and "*believe*" the Revelation of God.

Receive God's Words

"I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them." — Saved people receive God's words. It was the sure and certain promise of God in the covenant that his people would receive his words from the mouth of his Son, their Surety, by the power of his Spirit (Isaiah 55:11; 59:21). The words of God are found in the mouth of our covenant Surety. The words of God go forth from the mouth of our all-glorious Savior. And the words of God are received, not by an act of the sinner, but by the mighty operations of God the Holy Spirit.

The words of God are received into the renewed heart like seed sown upon good ground, ground prepared by grace. The words of God are received like the hard, dry, parched earth receives the dew of heaven.

There is no place in God's order of things for the priestly functions of deluded men, sacramental efficacy, or creature contrivances. Salvation is not the result of something you do or of preparations you make. Salvation is altogether in the hand of God. "*Salvation is of the Lord!*" It is by his will, by his word, and by his work!

Lost religionists quibble over the words of God. Believers receive his words, as John Gill put it, "willingly and gladly, with reverence and meekness, with love and thankfulness; so as to understand them and believe them, and so as to be affectionately and closely attached to them." Believers receive his Word (the whole Revelation of God); and his words (all the parts and doctrines of it).

Know Christ

Then the Master says, concerning those who have received his words, "*and (they) have known that I came out from Thee.*" — It is impossible to know the words of God until you are made to receive them by grace. But all who are graciously enabled to receive his words "*know*" Christ as he is revealed in the Word of God. He is the

incarnate God, the Sent One of God, the divinely appointed Substitute and Savior, and the accepted Sacrifice for sinners.

Believe God's Revelation

“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” — It is written, *“A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven”* (John 3:27). And when the good and perfect gift of God's salvation is given and received, those to whom it is given and by whom it is received know full well that it was the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, whom the Father sent into the world to save his people from their sins, who bought it with his blood, brought it by his grace, and wrought it by his Spirit.

Those who receive the words of God know the Son of God and believe the truth of God; and we gladly give all praise to God, saying, *“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake”* (Psalm 115:1). He chose us. He redeemed us. He called us. He keeps us. He's bringing us home, where we shall forever sing, *“Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb”* (Revelation 7:10).

Chapter 113
“Sanctify Them”

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17)

In this portion of his prayer our Savior is specifically making intercession for his disciples, those who were present with him on the earth at that time. Then, in verse 20, he tells us that the blessing he sought for them he requested for us as well. So that which our Lord Jesus sought for those disciples, he sought for all who would in time be given faith in him by the Spirit of God. In other words, this is our Savior’s prayer for us, God’s elect, for every redeemed sinner, for all who are called of God and born again by his omnipotent grace. This is what he asks of God for every sinner chosen in eternal love and redeemed by his sin-atonement blood upon the cursed tree. — *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* Sinners are sanctified by God through his truth; and his Word is his Truth. — Let’s look at our Lord’s petition line by line.

“Sanctify Them”

Here are three great privileges all of God’s elect enjoy by his grace. These three things are true of every saved sinner. By nature, we are all unrighteous and, therefore, unfit to inherit and inhabit the kingdom of God. — *“Ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:11). These three things are essential elements of God’s saving grace. Without them no one is or can be saved.

1. We must be *“washed,”* redeemed by the blood of Christ. This redemption, the atonement for our sins, was accomplished for all God’s elect when Christ died at Calvary. — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).
2. We must be *“sanctified”* by God the Holy Spirit. There is no salvation apart from sanctification. We must be made holy, or we cannot see God (Hebrews 12:14). This sanctification is accomplished for us and in us experimentally in regeneration, the new birth, when we are made new creatures in Christ, and made to be partakers of the divine nature. — *“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2 Peter 1:3-4).
3. We must be *“justified”* before God by his grace. Our justification was accomplished by the Lord God freely and graciously. He has imputed the righteousness of Christ to us, declaring us to be righteous before him. As our sins were imputed to Christ, though he could never sin, so his righteousness has been imputed to every believer, though we could never do righteousness. — We are *“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3:24). — *“For he hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

All three of these great privileges are works of grace. We do not wash ourselves, sanctify ourselves, or justify ourselves. God almighty, by distinct acts of grace, has washed us, sanctified us, and justified us.

All three of these works of grace belong to all believers, without exception. The person who lacks any of these works of God’s saving grace has not yet entered into the kingdom of God. He is lost, undone, and perishing in his sins. If you or I die without being washed, sanctified, and justified by the grace of God, we will not be numbered with God’s saints in the last day. It is not possible for a person to be saved by the grace of God who is not washed, justified, and sanctified.

We have very little difficulty discussing the matter of being washed by the blood of Christ and justified by his righteousness. Particular, effectual redemption and free justification are matters in which we all rejoice. But when it comes to sanctification, our thinking may not be as clear. Many, I fear, are still confused and a little uncomfortable. Because we are so much influenced by false religion, many of God's saints still imagine that sanctification is something beyond their reach. I want you to understand the doctrine of Holy Scripture. — If you are God's, if you trust Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, your Savior, your Advocate, your great High Priest, asks the Father to sanctify you. That means sanctification is yours. You are sanctified. — If you trust Christ, God the Holy Ghost declares in 1st Corinthians 6:11 "*Ye are sanctified!*" That means you are sanctified. Christ is made of God unto you Sanctification. Christ is your Sanctification. But what does that mean? What does it mean to be sanctified? What was our Savior asking for us when he prayed, "*Sanctify them*"?

What do you think of when you hear or read those words? The words "*saints,*" "*sanctify,*" "*sanctified,*" and "*sanctification*" are used repeatedly throughout the Scriptures. But very few people know what they mean, as they are used by the inspired writers.

Three Errors

We are fairly comfortable in discussing redemption and justification, but not sanctification. With regard to this subject, there is a great deal of confusion; and it needs to be cleared up. Errors regarding the doctrine of sanctification generally fall into one of three categories.

1. Pentecostalism teaches that sanctification is a second work of grace, whereby the believer is made totally free from sin and the old nature of sin is eradicated from his being. We know that such teaching is wrong for two reasons: -- *First*, it is directly contrary to the Word of God. "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8). -- *Second*, it is contrary to every believer's experience. As honest men and women, we must confess our sinfulness. Though we are no longer under the dominion of sin, we have a continual struggle with sin. Sin is in us. It is mixed with everything we do. It mars everything we do. If a person says he is without sin, he is a liar. The truth is not in him.
2. The self-righteous legalist makes sanctification nothing more than an outward, legal morality. To him sanctification is accomplished by his separation from the world, his obedience to religious customs and traditions, and his abstinence from the use of things he considers evil. "*Touch not, taste not, handle not*" is his creed.
3. Most of those who are regarded as orthodox, evangelical Christians teach that sanctification is the progressive increase of the believer in "personal holiness." We are told that the child of God attains higher degrees of holiness by his own works in sanctification, until at last he is ripe for heaven, and that sanctification ultimately buds forth into glorification. Among these are both fundamentalists and some who regard themselves as reformed in doctrine.

One writer defined sanctification in these words — "Sanctification is progressive righteousness, which, of course, means that it is incomplete righteousness." Another wrote, "Sanctification is the personal holiness of the believer." Usually this progressive, increasing righteousness is made to be the basis of the believer's assurance here and his heavenly reward hereafter. The words "progressive righteousness" imply the possibility of perfect righteousness. To suggest that we "progress in righteousness until we are ripe for heaven" is to suggest the possibility of sinless perfection!

Let's see what God says about sanctification in the Book he has written. I am sure you will see that sanctification as it is taught in the Bible is considerably different from the way it is commonly taught in theology books, and from most pulpits. Let us appreciate the writings of men who have been used of God, from

whom we may learn much. But when they vary from the Word of God, we must vary from them. I have no creed to defend, no confession to uphold, no denomination to answer to, and no catechism to teach, but this — *“Thus saith the Lord.”*

I want to show you one thing in this study and clearly demonstrate it from the Word of God. — Being an essential element of salvation, sanctification is and must be, in its entirety, the work of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. If salvation is by grace (And it is!), then all that is essential to salvation is by grace alone. Whatever sanctification is, it is the work of God alone. It is this fact, the fact that he is the One who sanctifies us that the Lord uses to encourage obedience in his people (Exodus 31:13).

Word’s Meaning

What is the meaning of the word *“sanctify”* as our Lord uses it in John 17:17? When the Savior prayed, *“Sanctify them,”* what did he mean? *“Sanctify”* is a Bible term. So let’s turn to the Bible to find out what it means. The word *“sanctify”* is used in three distinct ways in the Scriptures.

1. The first meaning of the word *“sanctify”* is *“to set apart,”* particularly, *“to set apart for God, or for divine service”*. Sanctification is taking something that is common and ordinary and setting it apart, separating it unto God’s service alone. This is the first and primary meaning of the word as it is used in the Bible.

The seventh day was set apart for God (Genesis 2:3). This is the first time the word *“sanctify”* is used in the Bible. — *“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.”* The day was not altered at all. It was simply set apart, separated from the other days of the week for God’s service alone.

The firstborn of all the families of Israel were set apart for God. — *“Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of men and of beast: it is mine”* (Exodus 13:2).

The Tabernacle, the altar, and the priesthood were sanctified unto the Lord, set apart for his use alone. — *“And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office”* (Exodus 29:44).

It is in this sense that our Lord Jesus Christ says he was sanctified by the Father and sanctified himself (John 10:36; 17:19). He was set apart from all other men to do the will of God by God the Father. And in this sense our Savior sanctified himself to do the work he was sent to do, to accomplish his Father’s will in the redemption and salvation of his people.

2. Secondly, as the word *“sanctify”* is used in the Word of God, it means *“to regard as holy,”* *“to treat as holy,”* and *“to declare that a person or thing is holy.”* For example: God himself is frequently said to be sanctified by his people. We do not make God more holy. And we do not separate God unto himself. But we do regard him as holy, treat him as one who is holy, and declare that he is holy. That is what it is to sanctify the Lord God in your heart. The Lord God commands us to regard him as holy. — *“Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread”* (Isaiah 8:13).

Nadab and Abihu were consumed by the Lord when they offered strange fire, because they did not reverence God’s holiness (Leviticus 10:3). Moses’ sin in smiting the Rock the second time, for which he was not allowed to enter the land of promise, was just this. — *“Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel”* (Numbers 20:12). We have an even more familiar illustration of this in what is called *“The Lord’s Prayer”*. Our Savior taught us to pray, *“Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”*

(Matthew 6:9). The word “*hallowed*” is simply another word for “sanctified.” The meaning is let thy name be revered and adored through the whole earth. Let men regard thy name as a holy and sacred thing.

The first meaning of the word “sanctify” is to set apart for God. The second meaning is to regard, treat, and declare a person or thing as being holy. — When a person is sanctified by God, he is regarded by God as one who is holy, declared by God to be holy, and treated by God as one who is holy. All who are sanctified are under God’s special care and protection. They are the apple of his eye. They are his anointed. And God says to all creation, “*Touch not mine anointed!*”

3. The third meaning of the word “sanctify” is “to actually purify something and make it holy”. This is more than a declaration. This is an actual change in the nature of things. The thing sanctified is not only set apart for God and declared to be holy, it is actually made holy.

When the Lord God was about to come down and give the law at Mt. Sinai, the children of Israel were required to make themselves ceremonially holy (Exodus 19:10-11) in a ceremonial picture of sanctification. And when Israel was about to cross the Jordan River God required them to first be ceremonially purified (Joshua 3:5).

Do you see the basic meanings of the word “*sanctify*” as it is used in the Scriptures? It is to set apart or separate for God, to regard, treat, and declare something or someone as holy, and to purify and make holy.

How?

How are the people of God sanctified? As I have already stated, our sanctification, like our redemption and justification, is the work of God almighty in the trinity of his sacred Persons. We are sanctified by God the Father in election, by God the Son in redemption, and by God the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Sanctification is not something we do for ourselves. It is something God does for us and in us. The words “*sanctify*”, “*sanctified*,” “*sanctifieth*,” and “*sanctification*” are used more than thirty times in the New Testament. We are said to be sanctified by the purpose of God, by the blood of Christ, by the Spirit of God, by faith in Christ, and by the Word of God. But never, not even once, are we said to sanctify ourselves. Sanctification is the work of God alone!

All believers were sanctified by God the Father in eternal election, being set apart by God’s decree for him and separated unto him (Jude 1:1). This is the character of God’s distinguishing grace. It sets some people apart from others and sanctifies them unto the Lord. We were secretly set apart for God in his secret, eternal decree of election before the world began. We were legally set apart from Adam’s fallen race by the purchase of Christ at Calvary, when he ransomed us from the curse of the law. And we were manifestly set apart and separated unto God by the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

The doctrine should be clear to all. — Every believer has been, in this sense, eternally sanctified, completely set apart by God for God. The practical importance of this glorious doctrine is this. — “*Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). My brother, my sister, we belong to the Lord our God. Let us therefore consecrate ourselves to him and serve him in all things (Romans 12:1-2). We belong to God. Be assured of this: — God almighty will protect all who belong to him in all their appointed ways, even as he protected the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament (Psalm 91:3-13).

All of God’s elect were perfectly sanctified by the blood of Christ when he died as our Substitute (Hebrews 10:10-14). Christ is our Sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). We have been and are forever “*sanctified in Christ Jesus*” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Believers are addressed throughout the Epistles as “saints”, that is as

“sanctified ones” in Christ. In the Lord Jesus Christ we who believe are regarded by God as perfectly holy, treated as if we were perfectly holy, and declared to be perfectly holy, because in Christ we are perfectly holy!

“With His spotless garments on
I am as holy as God’s Son!”

And all believers are actually made holy by God the Holy Ghost in regeneration. Through the instrumentality of gospel preaching, the Spirit of God effectually applies the blood of Christ to the hearts of God’s elect, purifying our hearts and implanting a new, holy nature within us. This is regeneration, the new birth. This is our sanctification by the Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:18).

We are a people with two natures, one that is holy and seeks after righteousness, and one that is corrupt and seeks after sin. These two natures are not equal in power. The divine nature rules and reigns, but the evil nature will not bow nor serve. While we live in this world we must continue to live with this old, sinful nature. But we do have a new nature created in us in the image of Christ, a nature that cannot sin. It is the old man that sins, not the new. — It is written, “*If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me*” (Romans 7:20).

In glorification the old man shall be totally eradicated from us, but not until then. That eradication of the old man is not a gradual, progressive thing. It is the radical, climatic change experienced by God’s saints in death, and ultimately in resurrection glory.

Progressive Sanctification

The Word of God does not teach the doctrine of progressive sanctification as it is commonly taught and understood by men. Be sure you understand what I mean by that statement. The Bible does not teach that in sanctification our old nature becomes less sinful and more holy. — “*Flesh is flesh.*” It cannot be sanctified. The old man is not sent to the hospital for a cure. He is sent to the cross to be crucified. The Bible does not teach that by sanctification we who believe attain progressively increasing degrees of personal holiness, and thereby improve our acceptance with God. Yet, the Scriptures do clearly represent the work of sanctification in the believer as a present, continual work of grace (1 Thessalonians. 1:3-7; 5:23-24). The child Christ Jesus was perfectly holy. Yet, he grew in that state of holiness. Even so, we are perfectly holy in Christ. We have a perfectly holy nature implanted in us. Yet, the believer grows in grace. Our holiness does not improve. But we grow in that state of holiness (Luke 2:52; 2 Peter 3:18).

Sanctification cannot be properly spoken of as a progressive work. A person is either holy or he is unholy. There is nothing in between. You cannot be more or less holy. But sanctification is a present, continual, on-going work of grace. Being sanctified by God, born again by the Holy Spirit, every believer grows in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every living thing grows. We see more, feel more, do more, know more, repent more, believe more, and love more, as we grow in grace. In sanctification there is an ever-increasing faith, hope, and love in the hearts of God’s elect.

Of this I am certain, wherever sanctification is found consecration of the heart increases, conformity to Christ in heart and life increases, commitment to Christ and his cause increases, love, devotion, confidence in, and submission to Christ increases, and confidence in Christ increases.

This growth in grace is the continual operation of God the Holy Spirit in sanctification. — “*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). To be sanctified is to be separated to God, treated as holy, and made holy.

“Through thy Truth”

The Lord Jesus prays, “*Sanctify them through thy truth.*” Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). He is the Embodiment of Truth and the Revealer of Truth; but he is more. — Christ is the Truth. He is the Truth foreshadowed and typified in all the law and the true fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. Our Lord’s prayer here is this. — Father sanctify my people, these you have given me through their union with me, through the merit of my blood and righteousness, through the grace they receive from me, and through their faith in me.

“Thy Word is Truth”

“*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” — Christ is the Truth and Christ is the Word. He is the Word revealed by the Word. Our Savior is saying, Father sanctify my people by your Word. This sanctification is a work of grace accomplished by the Spirit of God through the instrumentality of God’s Word (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Psalm 119:9-16).

Consecrate

But there’s got to be something more in our text. Remember, our Lord is here praying specifically for people who are already born of God, already believers, already his disciples. He is asking God the Father to sanctify people who are already sanctified. — “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” When we read verse 19, we learn exactly what he is asking. — “*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*”

How did the Lord Jesus sanctify himself? Our blessed Savior relentlessly dedicated himself, he relentlessly consecrated himself to the will of God and the glory of God, to the redemption and salvation of the people of God, utterly sacrificing himself to God, utterly consecrating himself to God, that we might be utterly consecrated to God, as “*a royal priesthood,*” serving God day and night. This is beautifully portrayed in Leviticus 8 and 14, where God’s priests were ceremonially sanctified by the blood of the sacrifice and the holy anointing oil put upon the tip of their right ears, the thumbs of their right hands, and the great toes of their right feet.

Let us be utterly separated unto God, utterly separated to Christ, utterly separated to the gospel, but never separated from one another. The object of our Savior’s prayer is found in verse 21.

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:17-21)

There is never an excuse for believers separating themselves from other believers. The Corinthians had terrible problems; but God never instructed one saint to separate himself from those other saints. The Galatians had horrid evils; but never once were they taught to separate saint from saint. Rather, we are to help the weak, lift the fallen, and forgive the offender (Galatians 6:1-2).

O Spirit of God, give me this grace. Sanctify me, for Christ’s sake. Cause me to be utterly consecrated to my Redeemer!

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

What I ask God to do for me I ask him to do for you.

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)

“Thou hast Loved Them as Thou hast Loved Me”

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:23)

John 17 contains our Lord’s prayer for us as our great high Priest. It not only records his desires for his people, which cannot and will not be denied (What Christ desires, Christ shall have!), but this great, intercessory prayer is a very instructive portion of holy Scripture, filled with Gospel truth. And the text that heads this page (John 17:23) teaches us something wondrous, mysterious, and delightful about God’s love for his elect, something that is simply astounding. This short, simple statement by our dear Redeemer is full of mysteries I will never be able to comprehend, much less explain. It is itself a profound volume of theology.

Christ in Us

“I in them” — The Lord Jesus Christ is in us in a distinctive, unique, saving way. Obviously, as the omnipresent God, Christ is in all the world. As the Creator of all men, he is in all men, giving all the light of conscience by which all are found guilty and condemned from within themselves. As the incarnate God, as a man, our Lord Jesus was once here, dwelling among men. — *“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!”* These things John tells us in chapter one (John 1:5, 9-11, 14).

But when our Lord says, *“I in them,”* he is telling us that he is in every believing sinner in a special, gracious manner. In regeneration, the new birth, he is revealed in us and to us. Christ is formed in us when we are born of God. He enters into the chosen, redeemed soul, taking possession of his ransomed one by almighty grace, establishes his throne in the heart, communicates his grace, and grants fellowship with himself, and dwells in the heart. He is to every heaven born soul, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory!”* He is in us by his Spirit, yes. But our text says more. He is personally in us! He is in us as the King in his kingdom, the Head in his members, and the Master in his house.

What wondrous, condescending grace! Christ is in us! Therefore, because he who is holiness dwells in us, we have holiness within, that holy thing which is born of God and cannot sin. Because he who is Light dwells within, we have light and shall never walk in darkness. Because he who is Life dwells within, we have life, eternal life, within and shall never perish. Because Christ dwells within us now in grace, he shall dwell in us forever in glory!

God in Christ

“I in them and thou in me” — God the Father is in Christ, not only as one with him in the holy Trinity, but also as our God-man Mediator. The Father is in the Son communicating all grace to us through him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in Christ the Mediator in all the fulness of the eternal Godhead. — *“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily!”* The Father is in the Son graciously now and will show himself in and through him and him alone forever. And the Father will show himself glorious in the Son throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Made Perfect

“I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one.” — All this fulness of God in Christ and of Christ in his people is designed for this purpose and shall accomplish it. Because God was in Christ, all his people were made perfect in justification when that man who is God died as our Substitute at Calvary. Because this Christ, in whom all the fulness of God dwells, dwells in us, we are made perfect in sanctification. He has made us holy and righteous, *“meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”* Because Christ is both in the Father and in us, because he is in glory, because he is within the veil, because his blood speaks there for us, we shall soon drop this robe of flesh and be made perfect in glory. Then we shall be perfect in knowledge, in holiness, and in peace, joy, and love. Because this great, glorious, gracious, omnipotent Christ is

in us and all God's elect are in him, the number of the saved in glory shall be perfect, complete. Not one shall be missing. And we shall be perfectly one. "*I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me.*" Soon, when he has done all that he purposed must be done, and time is no more, all the world will know who he is!

Loved As

"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." — *"Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me."* Imagine that! What an astounding word this is from our God and Savior! — *"Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me."* God the Father loved Christ as his own Son, and loved him as our Mediator from everlasting. He loved him when he assumed our humanity. The Father loved him while he walked on this earth as his obedient Son, fulfilling all righteousness for us. Oh, how the Father loved the Son, even when he was made sin for us, especially when he was made sin for us, though justice demanded that he both slaughter him and abandon him, pouring out all the horror of his holy wrath and fury upon him!

The instances and demonstrations of the Father's love to the Son are marvelous to behold. Because the Father loves the Son as our Mediator, he has put all things into his hands, trusting him with all his glory and all the people of his love (Ephesians 1:12). He has made him Head over all things, put all things under his feet, and determined that in all things he shall have the preeminence.

The Father's love for the Son is an eternal, immutable, indestructible love of complacency and delight. It will last forever. That I have no difficulty understanding. But what our Lord tells us here is infinitely gracious and glorious beyond my highest imagination. — Our Lord Jesus here declares that God the Father loves us, his people, in exactly the same way as he loves him!

He loves us not merely as his creatures (like a man loves his dog), not merely as the descendants of Adam (as a man loves a man), and certainly not as considered in ourselves (as a man despises and hates his most implacable, obnoxious enemy). But God loves us in his Son, for the sake of his Son, as he loves his Son!

Do you ask, "How does God display such love for us?" Behold how he loved us! — *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!"* — Does he indeed love us as he loves his own darling Son? Indeed, he does! — Did he choose Christ as our Mediator (Isaiah 42:1-4)? So he chose us (Ephesians 1:3-6). — Did the Father make a covenant with the Son before the world began (Psalm 89:28)? So he made a covenant with us (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:38-40). — Did the Father raise the Son from the dead, making him free from sin (1 Peter 4:1-2)? So he has raised us up from the dead, making us free from sin (Romans 8:1-4). — Did the Father supply the Son with all things in daily providence while he walked on earth? So he supplies us! — Did the Father send his Spirit and his angels to minister to his Son when he was tempted? So he delivers us out of all our temptations. — Does the Father perform all things for the Son? So our God performs all things for us! — Does the Father love the Son from everlasting? So he loves us! — Does the Father accept the Son? So he accepts us! — Does the Father love the Son with utmost pleasure, satisfaction, and delight? So he loves me! — *"Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me!"*

"Near, so very near to God, nearer I cannot be.
For in the person of his Son, I am as near as He!
Dear, so very dear to God, dearer I cannot be,
For in the person of his Son, I am as dear as He!"

Let my heart be forever humbled, ravished, inspired, and filled with praise to my God for his great love to me. Let my soul be forever exultant, joyful, and at peace! Let my life be forever and alone his!

What a great, glorious Gospel truth we have here. It is something that could never be known except by divine revelation. How honoring to our God! It is just like him. How comforting to our souls! To the extent that we are able to believe God's Revelation, our souls shall be comforted.

Our great all-glorious Savior says, *"Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."* Thus, he tells us that God our Father loves his elect in Christ as he loves Christ himself! That is such an amazing, stupendous thing

that were it not written in Holy Scripture, I would not dare to think it, much less declare it. But there it stands. And, oh, how my soul rejoices in it. It is our Savior's desire and purpose that the whole world shall know that God loves us as he loves him; and so it shall be! A. W. Pink wrote...

“When God's elect have all been gathered together in one (John 11:52), when the glory which Christ received from the Father has been imparted to them, when they shall have been made perfect in one, then shall the world have such a clear demonstration of God's power, grace, and love toward his people, that they shall *know* that the One who died to make this glorious union possible was the sent One of the Father, and that they had been loved by the Father as had the Son, for ‘*When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory*’ (Colossians 3:4); then ‘*he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe...in that day*’ (2 Thessalonians 1:10).”

That little word “*as*” means “just as,” “even as,” “in proportion as,” “to the same degree as.” When our Lord says, “*Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me,*” this great, little word, “*as,*” implies at least these three things.

Same Reason

First, there is a similarity of cause between God's love for Christ and his love for us. — “*Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*” The Lord God loves us for the same reason he loves his dear Son.

God loves us in Christ. God's love is not a universal sentiment for all men. God's love is in Christ. Apart from Christ, God is a consuming fire. This needs to be understood. These days, men everywhere are taught and universally presume that God loves them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Until you are united to Christ by faith, you have no reason to imagine that God loves you. Our faith in Christ does not cause God to love us. Our faith is the fruit and result of God's eternal love for us. But, until a sinner trusts Christ, only the wrath of God is revealed and known to him; and the wrath of God is upon him. Do you understand that? — Until you take refuge in Christ, God's wrath is upon you (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:3).

God loves us for Christ's sake. Thomas Manton rightly observed that “The elect are made lovely, and fit to be accepted by God, only by Jesus Christ...The ground of all that love God beareth to us is in Christ.”

We are “*accepted in the beloved.*” God accepts our faith, our worship, our works, and our persons only because of Christ, because we are in Christ, and because of what Christ has done for us.

And God the Father loves us for the same reason that he loves his dear Son as our Mediator. Be sure you get this. It will help you. God the Father does not love us for the same reason that he loves his Son as his Son. He loves his Son as his Son necessarily because his Son is one with him in being, perfection, and praise. He cannot but love Christ as God. Else he would cease to love himself. But God's love for Christ as our Mediator is based upon his perfect obedience unto God as our Mediator.

“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. 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. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” (John 10:14-17)

Do you understand what our Lord teaches us here? God's love for us is free and, at the same time, fully deserved. He said, “*I will love them freely*” (Hosea 14:4). Yet, his love, mercy, grace, and salvation flow to us upon the grounds of Christ's obedience as our Substitute. He is merciful and gracious to us, forgiving us of all sin, and loves us “*for Christ's sake*” (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). God the Father looked upon his Son from eternity as our perfect, obedient Mediator, and, for the sake of his Son, loved us with an everlasting love. Again, Thomas Manton wrote...

“God could not love us with honor to himself, if his wisdom had not found out this way of loving us in Christ...God was resolved to manifest an infinite love to man, but he would still manifest an infinite hatred against sin; which could not be more fully manifested than by making Christ the ground of our reconciliation...How could the holy God, the just God...love such vile and unworthy creatures as we are? The question is answered — he loveth us in Christ, and for Christ’s sake.”

Same Way

Second, this word “*as*” suggests a similarity of love. The Lord God loves his people in the same way as he loves his Son. Again, I stress the fact that our Savior is here comparing the Father’s love for him as our Mediator to his love for his elect. Christ, as our Mediator, is the first object of God’s love. He loved Christ as the head of his mystical Body, the Church, and us as members. He loved Christ for his own sake. He loves us for Christ’s sake.

God the Father loved Christ the God-man as “*the express image of his person*” (Hebrews 1:3). So he loves his people who in Christ have been (and those who yet must be) renewed “*after the image of him*” (Colossians 3:10; 2 Peter 1:4). He loves Christ as his only begotten Son; and he loves us in Christ as his adopted sons (1 John 3:1). Because the Savior says, “*Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me,*” we are assured that God loves his elect freely. As we have already seen, the Lord Jesus Christ earned his Father’s love as a man by his mediatorial obedience. Yet, when our Savior came into the world, the Lord God loved the Child freely, delighting in him even before he had fulfilled his will (Isaiah 42:1). He is that One of whom the Father says, “*In whom my soul delighteth!*” Even so, he loves us freely (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Hosea 14:4).

God loves us tenderly and affectionately. As the Father’s love for his Son is a tender, indescribably affectionate love, so is his love for us (Isaiah 62:5; Zechariah 2:8).

God’s love for his elect is immutable. As there is no possibility of change in our God (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17), God’s love does not change. It cannot be taken from us; and it cannot be destroyed, neither by us nor by hell itself (Romans 8:35-39).

The famous Arminian preacher, founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination, A.W. Tozer, made these statements about the love of God. They are shocking, but they accurately express what the whole religious world believes.

“God must love and will love man until hell has erased the last trace of the remaining image (of God in him). Men are lost now. But they are still loved of God...I believe that God now loves all lost men...(But) the day will come when lost man will no longer be loved by God Almighty...I believe the time will come when God will no longer love lost human beings.”¹

Such fickle, useless love may be worthy of fickle, useless man, but not of our great and glorious Lord God. Our God does not love today and hate tomorrow! His love is unchangeable!

Same Results

Thirdly, our Lord intends for us to understand that there is a similarity of results, that the effects and fruits, the consequences of God’s love to him and his elect are the same. Love that has no effect and bears no fruit is just lip-love; and lip-love is useless love. Love that is never known by the one loved is a frustrated passion that destroys one’s own peace and happiness. Love that never sees benefit and blessing upon its object, but only misery and woe, is a tormenting love. But that does not describe the love of God. Oh, no, a thousand times no! God’s love toward us, like his love toward his Son as our Mediator, is an effectual, fruitful, beneficial love. Here are *five things* mutually enjoyed by Christ and his people as the fruit and effect of God’s love.

1. The Revelation of Secrets — All things are open, common knowledge between people who love one another. As all things are manifest and made known to the Son as our Mediator by the Father (John

¹ The Tozer Pulpit, Volume 8, pp 23-25

1:18; 5:20), so all things are manifest and made known to God's elect by the Son (John 14:21; 15:15).

2. The Bestowment of Spiritual Gifts — God's love is a bounteous love. He has given all things to the Son (John 3:34-35; 17:2; Ephesians 4:8); and he has given all his people all spiritual, heavenly gifts in his Son (Ephesians 1:3).
3. Strength and Protection in Life — As the Lord Jesus was upheld, strengthened, and protected throughout the days of his obedience to do his Father's will (Isaiah 42:1), so the Lord God upholds, strengthens, and protects us, the objects of his love, throughout our days of obedience in this world (2 Corinthians 12:9).
4. Acceptance of All We Do for him — Everything that Christ did for God was accepted and well-pleasing to him because he loved him (Ephesians 5:2). And everything we do for God is accepted and well-pleasing to God through the merits of Christ because he loves us as he loved him (1 Peter 2:5). God our Father accepts our paltry efforts at serving and pleasing him for two reasons: (1.) He accepts our poor, sin stained obedience upon the merit of Christ's perfect obedience. And (2.) he accepts our efforts at pleasing him because of his fatherly love for us in Christ.
5. Honor and Exaltation — The Lord Jesus was honored and highly exalted by God the Father as the object of his love. He was given preeminence in, possession of, and power over all things (Psalm 2:7-8; Hebrews 1:8). The Lord God, our heavenly Father, will do the same for us (John 12:26; Revelation 3:21).

Hear the Son of God and rejoice! — *"Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me!"* — What a pillow upon which to rest our heads! What a comfort for our poor, aching hearts! What a glorious theme for daily meditation! What a cause for adoration, praise, and worship! We may be despised, misunderstood, abused, and hated of men, but we are loved of God! God our Father loves us even as he loves his darling Son; and he has so loved us from eternity!

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

Chapter 115
God's Everlasting Love for his Elect

“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: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

God's everlasting love for his elect is the fountain of all grace and salvation, and the reason for all that he does. In verse 23 our Savior declares — *“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”* — *“Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me!”* What a pillow upon which to rest our heads! What a comfort for our poor, aching hearts! What a glorious theme for daily meditation! What a cause for adoration, praise, and worship! We may be despised, misunderstood, abused, and hated of men, but we are loved of God! God our Father loves us even as he loves his darling Son.

In verse 24 the Son of God declare that God the Father has loved us as he loves his Son from eternity! — *“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; for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.”* With those words, our dear Savior declares that God's love for his elect is an everlasting love. And, as John Gill observed...

“God's everlasting, unchangeable, and invariable love to his elect, through every state and condition into which they come, is written as with a sun-beam in the sacred writings.”

When we dive into the ocean of God's everlasting love for his elect, there is no possibility of us sounding its depths. So when I have said all that I know about it, there will be plenty of room for meditation and study. I can do nothing more than bring up a few nuggets of gold from this deep mine of infinity. Let me show you *five things* about God's everlasting love for us in Christ.

The Eternality of It

God's love for us did not begin yesterday. It is not something born in time. His love for us does not begin with our love for him. — *“We love him because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). God's love for us springs up from eternity, and is the ground of divine predestination, of our election and redemption by Christ, and our calling by God the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:3; Ephesians 1:4-6; Ezekiel 16:8).

“The Father loved us ere we fell,
And will forever love;
Nor shall the powers of earth or hell
His love from Zion move.

‘Twas love that moved Him to ordain
A Surety just and good;
And on His heart inscribe the names
Of all for whom He stood.

Nor is the Surety short of love;
He loves beyond degree;
No less than love Divine could move
The Lord to die for me!

And O what love the Spirit shows!
When Jesus He reveals

To men oppressed with sin and woes,
And all their sorrows heals.

The Three-in-One, the One-in-Three,
In love forever rest;
The chosen shall in glory be
In His love ever blessed.”

—William Gadsby

All God’s acts and works of grace performed for us before the world began arise from and are demonstrations of his everlasting love for us. Election was an act of God’s eternal love (Ephesians 1:4). The covenant of grace was established by the triune God in eternity because of his great, everlasting love for us (2 Samuel 23:5; Romans 8:28-29; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 13:20). And trusting our souls into the hands of Christ as our Surety was a work of God’s eternal love (John 6:39; Ephesians 1:12).

The Immutability of It

There is no possibility of change in our God (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). God’s love does not change. It cannot be taken from us; and it cannot be destroyed, neither by us nor by hell itself (Romans 8:35-39). As I stated in our previous study, the famous Arminian preacher, founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination, A.W. Tozer, made the following horrible statements about the love of God.

“God must love and will love man until hell has erased the last trace of the remaining image (of God in him). Men are lost now. But they are still loved of God...I believe that God now loves all lost men...(But) the day will come when lost men will no longer be loved by God Almighty...I believe the time will come when God will no longer love lost human beings.”¹

Such fickle, useless love may be worthy of fickle, useless man, but not of the great and glorious Lord God. Our God does not love today and hate tomorrow! His love is unchangeable! Nothing could be more dishonoring to God than failure (Numbers 14:11-16); but “*He shall not fail!*” God’s love, like all his gifts bestowed upon men, is without repentance. He will never cease his own to cherish. Those who are loved of God have been loved of God from everlasting, and shall be loved of God to everlasting. His love is eternal both ways. He will not depart from the objects of his love nor cease to do them good, for he cannot change (Jeremiah 32:40; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).

The salvation of God’s elect does not stand upon a precarious foundation of time, but upon the immutable foundation of God’s everlasting love. We change often; but there are no changes in his love. Our love is sometimes hot and sometimes cold; but his love is invariably the same. God graciously and wisely changes the dispensations of his providence toward his people, hiding his face and chastening us because of our sin; but his love never changes (Isaiah 54:10; Hebrews 12:5-11). His chastisements are evidences of his love. Even when we sin against him, as we often do, God’s love does not change. Understand this, and rejoice. — God’s love toward his elect is from everlasting, and never changes to any degree or for any reason (Psalm 89:19-37; John 13:1).

The Gifts of It

Love gives. The gifts of God’s free and everlasting love are too many for us to calculate. Let me just show you three things that are clearly revealed as the gifts of God’s everlasting love to his elect. In comparison with these three, all others, great as they are, must be considered to be far, far less.

¹ The Tozer Pulpit, Volume 8, pp 23-25

1. The Lord God has given us himself because of his great, everlasting love for us (Ezekiel 37:27). He says, *“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*
2. The gift of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to suffer and die as our Substitute was and is the great commendation of his love to us (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10; 1 John 3:16; 4:10). — *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!”* (2 Corinthians 9:15).
3. The gift of his Spirit to regenerate, call, and seal us in his grace in *“the time of love”* is the gift of God’s everlasting love to us (Ezekiel 16:8; Titus 3:3-6).

“Indeed, all that God does in time, or will do to all eternity, is only telling his people how much he loved them from everlasting.” (John Gill)

“‘Twas not to make Jehovah’s love
Towards the sinner flame,
That Jesus, from His throne above
A suffering man became.

‘Twas not the death which He endured,
Nor all the pangs He bore,
That God’s eternal love procured,
For God was love before.

He loved the world of His elect
With love surpassing thought;
Nor will His mercy e’er neglect
The souls so dearly bought.”

— *John Kent*

The Distinctiveness of It

God’s love is distinct and distinguishing love. It is utter nonsense to talk about God loving all men. I sometimes hear preachers try to soft peddle God’s sovereignty by assuring people that there is a sense in which God loves all men with a love of benevolence though not with a love of complacency and delight. They say God loves all men as his creatures, just as he loves trees and toads. If you can get any comfort from the idea that God loves you like he loves a frog, I guess I shouldn’t take that away from you, but it simply is not the teaching of Scripture.

God loves his elect distinctively. — God does not love all men. I would not emphasize that fact, were it not for the fact that those who teach that God’s love is universal are guilty of three horrible crimes.

1. They make the love of God changeable.
2. They make the love of God meaningless.
3. They destroy the greatest motive there is for godliness and devotion. Try telling you wife that you love all women alike. See if that inspires her devotion to you!

The Word of God tells us in the plainest terms possible that God’s love for his elect is a special, sovereign, distinctive, and distinguishing love (Isaiah 43:1-5; Romans 8:29; Romans 9:11-24).

God loves his people delightfully. — I mean by that that God delights, takes pleasure in, and is complacent with his elect because of his love for them. God so loves us that he smiles on us perpetually, even when he appears to be frowning upon us!

It is high time that all attempts to divide the love of God into categories, stages, and degrees be laid aside. They do nothing to help men and only obscure the glory and grandeur of our God. If God loves me, he delights in me. If he does not delight in me, he does not love me. Again I say, try telling your wife, "Honey, I really do love you. I wish you well. I want nothing but the very best for you, and am willing to do anything I can for you. But you do not please me. You are offensive to me. I do not enjoy your company. In fact, I really do not want to look at you." If you still have a wife tomorrow, let me know.

Our God loves us as he loves his darling Son. That means he is well-pleased with us (Matthew 17:5). The Father and the Son are one; and the Son of God tells us that his "*delights*" were with us from eternity (Proverbs 8:31). He could not have used a stronger word than this to express his love for us. The word "*delights*" expresses the most intimate, sweet, ravishing pleasure. Can you get hold of this? Our God so delights in us that he says, "*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse: thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes*" (Song of Solomon 4:9).

The Efficacy of It

God's love is more than a wish or desire in his heart to save sinners. God's love for us is an effectual love. That simply means that those who are the objects of God's love shall be saved, precisely because they are the objects of his love. Otherwise, the love of God is an utterly useless thing. God's love is sovereign (Romans 9:16-18). God's love is sacrificial (1 John 3:16). God's love is saving (Ezekiel 37:27). And God's love is steadfast (John 13:1). Let us rejoice it!

"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 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: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

What an amazing, stupendous revelation of God's love for us! Men tell me that such teaching as this promotes licentiousness and antinomianism, that it discourages godliness and good works; but that is absurd.

When I think of the things we have been meditating upon in this message, that God loved me when I hated him, that he loved me before the world began, that he loves me as he loves my Savior, that his love for me will never cease, never change, and never vary, these thoughts compel me to love him, and lay me under the greatest obligations possible to reverence him, worship him, devote myself to his glory and his will, and serve his interests while I live in this world (1 John 4:19; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Titus 3:5-8). Does it not do the same for you?

Chapter 116 God's Love in Us

“And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

“*God is love.*” — That is Who God is and what God is. — “*God is love!*” God commends his love toward us in the sacrifice of his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8). The Triune God acts in love for us in all his works of grace and providence. The nuptial chariot in which our blessed Savior carries his Bride through the ages of time is “*paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem*” (Song of Solomon 3:10). “*In love*” he “*predestinated us*” unto life everlasting! God sheds abroad his love in us in the gift of his Spirit (Romans 5:5). And God's love is made perfect in us when by faith in Christ we are made to know and assured of his love for us (1 John 4:9-19).

The Lord's Prayer

In John 17 the Lord Jesus is about to leave this world. He is going back to the Father. He has told his disciples that they must abide on the earth for a while, that they must endure unceasing trials, heavy troubles, and great tribulation. He has promised to send his Holy Spirit to comfort them. He has promised to help them. He urged them to simply trust him. But he knew their hearts were heavy, anxious, troubled, and fearful. He knew that they were full of doubts and questions. So, just before he goes out from them, just before he goes to die in their room and stead, the Son of God tenderly takes them by the hand, as it were, and says, “Let's go to God and pray.”

It is this great, high priestly prayer that is before us in John 17. In these 26 verses our Master prays for the complete and perfect salvation of our souls (the salvation of all God's elect). He prays for our preservation (v. 11, 15), our joy (v. 13), our sanctification (v. 17), our union with one another in him (vv. 21-23), our heavenly glory (v. 24), and our complete gratification (v. 24), “*being perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” In this 26th verse, the Lord Jesus makes this wondrous declaration — “*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*” With those words our blessed Savior tells us the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection as our Substitute.

Great Subject

I cannot imagine a subject of greater depth, a mystery more wondrous, or a motive more inspiring than the love of God. The love of God is an ocean of infinite depth, a mine with infinite treasures, and a mystery of infinite wonders. It is infinitely vast, infinitely full, infinitely rich, and infinitely wondrous!

The love of God is a subject completely beyond the reach of comprehension in our present state. He who knows the most about it knows very little. Here is a subject into which we may dig and dig as deep as heart and mind will allow, and still never discover all the golden nuggets which lie within it.

Yet, it a subject that is always indescribably delightful, comforting, and instructive for our souls. How many have been converted by the commendation of God's love to sinners in the sacrifice of his darling Son! What has more effectually corrected us from the error of our ways than a fresh reminder of God's love for us? Nothing so effectually reproves our sin, unbelief, and worldliness as the love of God for us. Nothing moves our hearts Godward like the revelation of God's love for us.

May God the Holy Spirit show us something of the wondrous mystery here revealed. — “*I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*” Here our Savior speaks about what he had done, what he would do, and why. In a word, he here declares in the hearing of his disciples the entire purpose of his existence in human flesh, summarizes the whole

of his work, and asserts that the purpose of it all is this: — *“That the love wherewith thou has loved me may be in them, and I in them!”*

In Us

The very last word of our Lord’s prayer is concerning the love of God for us; but here the love of God for us is made manifest by the love of God in us. This is the last petition which he offers, — *“That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”* He means for us to know and enjoy the love of God for us! But there is more here than that. He prays that the love wherewith the Father loved him may itself be in us! He could ask nothing greater than this. He asks that we might be filled with all the fulness of the love of God. In that great request, our dear Savior asks that we might be filled with all the fulness of God himself, for God is love. God is love, and he in whom loves dwells, dwells in God and God in him.

This is the very beginning of the experience of grace. When God comes to sinners in saving power and grace, he puts his love in them (Romans 5:1-5). Well might we sing with Charles Wesley...

“Only love to us be given,
Lord, we ask no other heaven!”

Indeed, there is no other heaven here below or yonder above than to enjoy the fulness of his perfect love. This is where the prayer of our great High Priest ends. — *“That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them.”*

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

(Ephesians 3:14-19)

God Revealed In Christ

First, the Lord Jesus looks backward and summarizes his entire life and ministry. — *“I have declared unto them Thy name.”* There is no salvation without knowing God. And there is no knowing God apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge is not salvation; but there is no salvation without knowledge.

The Son of God came down here in human flesh and dwelt among us, so that we who are but weak flesh might know the eternal, infinite, incomprehensible God. He says, *“I have declared unto them thy name.”* What a tremendous statement of fact! Here is a man appealing to the righteous judgment of God himself, asserting with absolute, unqualified confidence that he had fully, constantly, and perfectly made known to men all that God is!

The strange thing is that you and I are not astonished by this fact. Some who read these lines have heard it from their infancy, and have heard it so constantly that it no longer seems astonishing. Be astonished, my soul! Here is a man who never learned anything about God, a man who has fully revealed God, a man who is God! This is our Savior’s own account of his whole life and ministry. The meaning of all that he is and all that he did on this earth is just this: — He stood here in human flesh and said, “Look at me. This is God. ‘I AM!’”

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he

that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” (John 14:7-10)

As the Father was and is revealed only in Christ, so it is only by Christ that he is revealed to us and in us. The only way men and women can and will know God is by special, divine revelation (Matthew 11:25-27). The knowledge here spoken of is a knowledge Christ gives. — *“I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it.”* — It is not knowledge we pick up as a matter of book learning, but knowledge given us by Christ. It is not knowledge communicated by a preacher, but knowledge granted by God the Holy Spirit.

“At that time 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. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and 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 11:25-27)

This knowledge distinguishes God’s elect from the world. It is the mark by which the elect are made manifest. In the sixth verse of this chapter our Lord says: — *“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gayest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gayest them me; and they have kept thy word.”* The world does not know the Father, and cannot know him, for it abides in the darkness and death of sin. Judge yourselves therefore by this sure test, and let the love which grows out of gracious knowledge be a token for good unto you.

God’s Name Declared

Second, our Savior looks forward to that which he would yet do. Look at the text again. — *“I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.”* Throughout his life he had declared the Father’s name, his character. But he had not yet finished the revelation.

Had the revelation ended here, no son of Adam could ever have known God. He says, *“I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.”* Go with him to Gethsemane, and hear him declare the name of God. But do not stop in Gethsemane. Go on to Calvary. Pause, my soul, adore and wonder! Here, as I behold the Christ of God suffering all the horrid wrath of God as my Substitute, I see the Lord God himself revealed. Now my soul cries with the prophet, *“Lo, this is our God! We have waited for him! He will save us!”*

Only now, through Christ crucified, is it possible for God to be both the righteous God and my righteous Father. Only now, through his precious blood, can the Judge of all the earth, who must do right, embrace us poor, derelict prodigals as the sons of his love!

“Lo! In the grace that rescued man
God’s brightest form of glory shines!
Here, on the cross, ‘tis fairest drawn
In precious blood and crimson lines.

Here I behold His inmost heart,
Where grace and vengeance strangely join,
Piercing His Son with sharpest smart,
To make the purchased treasure mine.

Oh, the sweet wonders of that cross,

Where God the Savior loved and died!
Her noblest life my spirit draws
From His dear wounds and bleeding side.”

When God the Holy Spirit comes to sinners in saving mercy, he is sent by the enthroned Christ, who continually declares the Father unto men by the gospel in the saving operations of his grace. When God saves a sinner, not only has the sinner learned who God is, the Father’s name has been so declared and manifested in the Son and by the Son in the sinner’s heart that the sinner is made to love the God he once despised!

But do not ever imagine that there will be an end to this glorious work. The knowledge of the infinite God comes to us gradually. How slow we are in learning! And when we have learned all that can be learned here, we will have learned but little. Throughout the glory of eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ will be declaring the Father to us.

The Reason

Third, our Savior tells us the reason for this revelation of God. He says, “*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*” Our Lord’s prayer is not that the Father’s love may be set upon us, or moved toward us. God does not love us because we know him. He loved us long before we knew him. Paul speaks of “*his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.*” Christ did not come to set his Father’s love upon the chosen. Oh, no! He did not die to get the Father to love us. He came here and died because God loved us.

“Twas not to make Jehovah’s love toward His people flame,
That Jesus from the throne above, a suffering man became.

“Twas not the death which He endured, nor all the pangs He bore,
That God’s eternal love procured, for God was love before.

He loved the world of His elect, with love surpassing thought;
Nor will His mercy e’er neglect the souls so dearly bought!”

— *John Kent*

“*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*” — I cannot begin to tell you all that is included in this statement. (A man cannot tell what he does not know, and shouldn’t try!) But it is certain that our Lord would have us understand at least these four things.

1. Our Lord Jesus here prays that the love of God for us would be shed abroad in our hearts, assuring us of the Father’s love for us (Romans 5:5). Our blessed Savior would have us enjoy a deep, continuous, undisturbed assurance of the love of God for us. It is this revelation of the love of God that is both the cause and the fruit of faith in Christ.
2. Our great Savior would have us constantly realize that the love the Father has for us is that same love which he enjoys! — “*That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them.*”

Oh, wonder of wonders! The love wherewith the Father loved his Son is his love to poor sinners in his Son! — You are, my brother, my sister, the object of God’s delight, even as Christ is, because you are in Christ! I cannot state this more clearly or more wondrously than Spurgeon did, when preaching on this same subject. Here is what C. H. Spurgeon said to his congregation in London, England 150 years ago...

“Do not tell me that God the Father does not love you as well as he does Christ: the point can be settled by the grandest matter of fact that ever was. When there was a choice between Christ and his people which should die of the two, the Father freely delivered up his own Son that we might live through him. Oh, what a meeting there must have been of the seas of love that day, when God’s great love to us came rolling in like a glorious springtide, and his love to his Son came rolling in at the same time. If they had met and come into collision, we cannot imagine the result; but when they both took to rolling together in one mighty torrent, what a stream of love was there! The Lord Jesus sank that we might swim, he sank that we might rise and now we are borne onward forever by the mighty sweep of infinite love into an everlasting blessedness which tongues and lips can never fully set forth. Oh, be ravished with this. Be carried away with it; be in ecstasy at love so amazing, so divine: the Father loves you even as he loves his Son; after the same manner and sort he loveth all his redeemed.”

3. Our love for Christ is a reflection of the Father’s love. What a poor word I have chosen to express what I want to say — “reflection!” But how else can I say it? That love which we have for our Savior is the Father’s love for him. It is the love of God in us, created in us, born in us for his Son. The love is mine. I love him. Yet, it is his. He gave me the heart to love him, and put the love in it. Therefore, I can truthfully sing...

“My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;
For thee all the follies of sin I resign.”

4. The love of the Father for the Son that dwells in us is that love that beams forth and radiates from God’s saints to others (1 John 4:8-14).

Christ in Us

Fourth, in the very last line of this great, great prayer. Our Savior came here to make God known to men; that the love of God might dwell in us. But there is more. He came here to make God known to us, that the love of God might dwell in us, and that he might dwell in us! — *“I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

The Lord Jesus Christ dwells in his people by faith, assuring us of God’s perfect love for us. What can this possibly mean? Obviously, we cannot now apprehend it; but soon we shall (John 14:20). For now, it is enough to know that Christ dwelling in us is the assurance of God’s love for us and of our hope of glory yet to come (Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 3:14-21). Christ in you is the hope of glory, because Christ in you is the assurance of God’s perfect love which *“casteth out all fear”* (1 John 4:9-19).

Would you be assured of God’s love for you? Would you have God’s perfect love in you, that perfect love that *“casteth out all fear”* and will give you boldness in the Day of Judgment? Come, trust my Savior. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!” “He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life!”*

Chapter 117
Gethsemane's Sovereign

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band *of men* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am *he*. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am *he*: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:1-11)

When our dear Savior finished his great intercessory prayer as our great High Priest before his Father and our Father in John 17, he arose and walked across the brook Cedron and entered into the Garden of Gethsemane. It was in the Garden of Eden that the first Adam fell, plunged our race into sin, and death, and utter ruin, and lost everything. And our Lord Jesus Christ (the last Adam) came into a garden to restore that which he took not away. It was in a garden where our Savior sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground, as he anticipated being made sin for us. It was in a garden where he was nailed to the cursed tree, when he suffered and died as our Substitute. It was in a garden where he was buried. And it was in a garden where he came forth in resurrection power, triumphant over death, hell, and the grave!

Augustine said, “It is fitting that the blood of the Physician should there be poured out, where the disease of the sick man first commenced.”

But did you ever notice that of the four inspired Gospel narratives John alone makes no mention of our Savior's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired to write about our Savior's great heaviness and sorrow of heart in Gethsemane with considerable detail. John was inspired to omit that altogether. Why?

I can only guess what the answer to that question may be; but I think, at least in part, the answer is obvious. — John's distinct objective throughout his Gospel narrative is to show us the greatness of our Savior as the Almighty God. So, when he described Gethsemane, he mentioned nothing of weakness and sorrow. He only spoke of majesty, sovereign control, and the assured salvation of God's elect by Christ, our sovereign Savior.

Symbolic Brook

First, learn that our Savior's crossing over the brook Cedron was highly symbolic (v. 1). This brook Cedron is the same as the brook Kidron mentioned so often in the Old Testament. You will remember that King David, who was an eminent type of our Savior, passed over the brook Kidron when he was fleeing from Absalom (2 Samuel 15:23). It was there, at the brook Kidron that King Asa burned his mother's idol and scattered its ashes (2 Chronicles 15:16). Here it was that the good King Josiah caused the polluted vessels of the temple to be burned (2 Kings 23:4). And all the uncleanness found in the house of the Lord in Hezekiah's reign was disposed of in the brook Kidron (2 Chronicles 29:16).

Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat was led by a fit man across the brook Kidron and into the wilderness. The word “Kidron” (Cedron) means “turbid” or “blackness.” You can imagine the filth,

foulness, and blackness of it. All the blood of all the temple sacrifices ran down into the brook Kidron! There, beside the brook Kidron, all the waste of the sacrifices was burned. What a loathsome, repulsive stream it must have been!

With all that in mind, read Psalm 110:1-7, and see the significance of John's declaration that our Lord Jesus Christ went "*over the brook Cedron*" into the Garden of Gethsemane.

"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people [shall be] willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill [the places] with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head."

Obviously, our Savior did not physically drink the waters of that foul brook Kidron; but, passing over it, he drank of the brook in his way in a spiritual sense. He drank that which is far more foul than that metaphorical brook. Our blessed Savior took the cup of our iniquities, transgressions, and sins. He drank all the filth and blackness of our sins when he was made sin for us. He drank the cup of trembling, as our divine Surety. Yes, he drank the very dregs of that cup that we might drink the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord; and he did it voluntarily (John 18:11; Isaiah 51:22; Galatians 3:13-14; Psalm 116:13).

Christless Religion

Second, let us learn that nothing has such a hardening effect upon the heart of man as religion without Christ (vv. 2-3). Judas was one of the twelve Apostles. Yet, Judas guided the soldiers to the Savior. John tells us specifically that Judas used his knowledge of the fact that the Lord Jesus often came to Gethsemane for prayer to lead the soldiers to him. There he had often knelt with the Son of God; and there he betrayed him. — How shocking! When the band of men and officers approached the Savior, Judas "*stood with them.*"

Yet, this was a man who had been for three years the constant companion of the incarnate God. He had seen the Lord's miracles. He had heard his sermons. Judas had enjoyed the benefit of the Savior's private instruction. He had professed himself a believer. He had even worked and preached in Christ's name! J. C. Ryle observed...

"From the highest degree of privilege down to the lowest depth of sin, there is but a succession of steps. Privileges misused seem to paralyze the conscience. The same fire that melts wax, will harden clay."

Beware of resting your hopes of salvation on religious knowledge, however great; or religious advantages, however many. Many there are, I fear, who know all doctrinal truth and are teachers of others, preaching true doctrine zealously, who yet prove reprobate and go down to the pit with Judas! You may bask in the full sunshine of spiritual privileges and have great knowledge, you may be known as a tireless worker for the cause of God, and yet not know God. — "*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12). — Nothing so hardens the heart of man as religion without Christ!

Known Sufferings

Third, we are here taught that our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, knew from the beginning all that must come upon him as our Redeemer. — "*Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?*" (v. 4).

One of the things that must have made our Savior's sufferings so terrible is the fact that he had perfect knowledge of all the torments he must endure as our Substitute from the beginning. He knew full well all the bitter dregs of the cup before he took it into his holy hands of grace. He knew the scourging, the thorns, the cross, the sin, the curse, the agonizing death that awaited him. No doubt, every time he saw a lamb in the meadow, every time he saw a sacrifice in the temple, he was reminded that he must soon be offered upon the altar of divine justice as the Lamb of God.

Voluntary Substitute

Fourth, the Holy Ghost here teaches us again that our Lord Jesus Christ was our voluntary Substitute. He suffered all that he suffered for us, and died in our place under the wrath of God, by the hands of wicked men, because he desired to do so (vv. 4-11).

“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am *he*. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am *he*: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Our Lord Jesus, was the Sovereign even in Gethsemane. Notice, it was he who took the initiative, not the soldiers, the Pharisees, or Judas. He said to those who came to arrest him, “*Whom seek ye?*” Thus, he demonstrated with divine force that he was in total control of the situation. When our Lord said, “*I AM,*” “*they went away backward and fell to the ground!*” This is, perhaps, the greatest miracle recorded upon the pages of Inspiration. It was accomplished by the Savior's mere declaration of his Being. Here is an army of soldiers, with weapons of war, falling backward to the earth, prostrated before the Lord Jesus by the simple words of the incarnate God, “*I Am!*” Who but God could have wrought such a miracle?

This, too, was the fulfilment of divine prophecy. — “*When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell*” (Psalms 27:2). Isaiah spoke of the same thing (Isaiah 11:1-4).

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

How easily that same breath and those same words might have cast those men down into hell. Do not overlook this. Those very words and that very breath, by which the Lord Jesus gives life, and comfort, and strength to his people, bring death, and judgment, and destruction upon his enemies (Isaiah 51:12; 58:9; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Our dear blessed Savior took the cup of God's wrath willingly. He was not forced to take it, but was determined to take it (v. 11). Yes, he prayed three times, “*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from*

me.” How he trembled at the prospect of being made sin for us and dying under the just curse of God’s holy law as our Substitute. — Behold, the bloody sweat! Yet, he bowed to his Father’s will, saying, “*Not my will, Thy will be done!*” Then, he rose up from prayer and went out to meet Judas, the Pharisees, the Priests, and the soldiers, healed the wounded soldier, told Peter to put up his sword, and said, “*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*”

The Son of God died as a willing Sacrifice! He is our willing Savior. He did not die because he could not help it. He did not suffer because he could not escape. All the soldiers of Pilate’s army could not have taken him, had he not been willing to be taken. They could not have hurt a hair of his head, had he not given them permission. The Lamb of God, our Savior, was a willing sufferer, a willing substitute, a willing sacrifice.

He set his heart upon accomplishing our redemption from everlasting. He loved us and gave himself for us, cheerfully, willingly, gladly, in order to make atonement for our sins and save us. This was “*the joy set before him*” for which he “*endured the cross and despising the shame.*” The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our great Savior, is far more willing to save than we are to be saved. He died as a willing, voluntary Substitute. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep.

What an example he set before us to follow. In his obedience to his Father, suffering death by his Father’s will, he is not only our Redeemer, but our Example, too. The only way we can live in this world in peace is by continually bowing to our Father’s will. He is the truly wise man who has learned to say at every stage of his pilgrimage, “Father, give me what you will, place me where you will, do with me as you will; not my will, but your will be done.” That is the man who has the mind of Christ. May God make it mine!

Justice’s Demands

Fifth, the death of Christ in the place of his people demands the salvation of all for whom he died (v. 8). Our Savior here declared to these soldiers, the representatives of law and executioners of justice, “If you take me, you must let these go their way. You cannot have the Shepherd and the sheep. You cannot punish both the Substitute and those for whom the Substitute is punished. — “*Let these go their way!*” — That was not a request, but a command, a command to which justice must and will acquiesce! As Augustus Toplady put it...

“From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hath not the Father, put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate’er thy people owed;
God’s wrath on me cannot take place
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood?

If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty;
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.”

Tender Watchfulness

Look at verse 8 again, and see this *sixth* lesson. — Our dear Savior always watches over his people with a keen eye, a tender heart, and omnipotent grace. — “*Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way:*”

Here is an instructive picture of all our Savior’s dealings with our souls. He will not allow you who trust him “*to be tempted above that which you are able to bear.*” He holds the winds and storms in his hands. He will not allow his own, however sifted and buffeted, to be utterly destroyed. He watches over each of his redeemed tenderly. Like a wise physician, he measures out and mixes our cup with infinite skill, infinite care, and infinite love. Let us lean our souls on this precious truth. In the darkest hour the eye of the Lord Jesus is upon us, and our safety is sure.

Sure Salvation

Seventh, God the Holy Ghost reminds us again that the salvation of God’s elect is a matter of absolute certainty. — “*That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none*” (v. 9). God’s elect shall never perish! The decree of God demands it. The blood of Christ demands it. The seal of the Spirit demands it.

Would you have this salvation? Would you have this great Savior? Come to him, and this salvation is yours. Come to him, and he is yours!

“Come humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve;
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve.

‘I’ll go to Jesus, though my sins
Like mountains round me close;
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

‘Prostrate I’ll lie before his throne,
And there my guilt confess;
I’ll tell him I’m a wretch undone
Without his sovereign grace.’

I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives!

Perhaps He will admit my plea,

Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know,
I must forever die.

But if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (Delightful thought!) —
As sinner never died!”

Chapter 118
Jesus Taken, and Bound, and Led Away

“Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and *so did* another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also *one* of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also *one* of his disciples? He denied *it*, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being *his* kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.”

(John 18:12-27)

Here, within the crowded palace of the high priest, they had made a fire to warm themselves, because it was cold. What a striking revelation that is. Just a very few hours earlier, our Lord Jesus knelt in prayer in the open air of Gethsemane. There, as he prayed, he broke out into a bloody sweat. What agony he endured, what a load pressed him down, as he anticipated being made sin for us!

There are five things in this part of John’s Gospel that stand out as matters of great importance and spiritual instruction. As we follow our Savior into the palace of Caiaphas the high priest, may God the Holy Spirit, whose Word we have before us, be our Teacher.

Adorable Providence

The first thing that strikes me in this portion of Holy Scripture is the display of God’s adorable providence. Our great God rules and overrules all things, abounding toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of his will. According to his own good pleasure, he always works “*all things after the counsel of his own will*” (Ephesians 1:8-11). Nothing is more wonderful to contemplate or more comforting to remember than that. Never miss, never overlook, never lightly esteem these displays of God’s wise and good, adorable providence.

First, John reminds us that that this high priest, “*Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people*” (v. 14). Though Caiaphas did not know God and did not know our Savior, though he was nothing but a self-serving religious leader, God used him to proclaim as clearly as any man ever did the message of the Gospel he despised, — Substitutionary Redemption by the Sacrifice of Christ (John 11:50-52).

Next, it seems to me that the Holy Spirit inspired John to describe Peter’s denial of the Lord Jesus in such a way that we could not miss seeing that the Lord himself placed Peter in the place of temptation. No man is tempted of God; but no temptation comes without God’s decree. Our Lord Jesus told Peter how he would deny him three times that very night. Yet, Peter could not have gotten into the high priest’s palace had God not

placed that disciple there who was known to the high priest (vv. 15-16). That disciple went in first, got permission for Peter to come in, and then went back to the door and told the door-keeper that Peter had permission to come into the palace.

There Peter would deny the Lord Jesus, displaying that there is no evil that is not in us, no evil we will not perform when left to ourselves, and no strength in us to resist temptation, to resist the devil, or to resist the vile passions of our depraved hearts. There the Lord Jesus would look upon his fallen disciple with the tender eyes of unfailing mercy, love, and grace. There, the Lord Jesus used the maid, the soldier, and the devil to prepare the way for him to make himself more intimately known to Peter, the object of his love (John 21:15-17). There the Lord Jesus would have Peter sifted in the sieve as wheat, that he might make him a more useful preacher and servant of God than he could otherwise be.

Third, we again see the display of our great God's adorable providence in using the Jews to accomplish the fulfilment of the sacrificial type. According to the Levitical law (Leviticus 17:1-9), the sacrifice offered to God had to be examined by the high priest before it was offered to God. So Christ our Sacrifice was brought to the high priest before he was sacrificed. Though Caiaphas said nothing about his innocence as the spotless Lamb of God, when Caiaphas sent Him to Pilate, Pilate declared Him to be without fault (1 Peter 1:17-20).

The first thing that stands out in our text is God's adorable providence.

When carnal reason would demand
Why this or that my God ordained,
My heart in faith, Lord, humbly bend
Before Your throne, my God and King.

When doubts disturb me and distress,
When darkness seems to block my way,
Oh give me grace on this to rest, —
That thus it seemeth good to Thee!

Be this my joy: — My Christ is Lord
And by all things performs His will.
Your providence I would adore,
And calmly, sweetly trust You still.

Astonishing Hardness

Second, the Spirit of God here gives us a display of the astonishing hardness of depraved hearts. We see this in the conduct of the men by whom our Lord Jesus was arrested. Some of them were Roman soldiers. Some were servants of the priests and Pharisees. Among them were Judas and the Pharisees. But in one thing they were all alike. They all saw our Savior's divine power exhibited when they "*went backward and fell to the ground.*" All saw the miracle our Lord performed when he touched Malchus' ear and healed him. Yet, all remained unmoved, cold, indifferent, insensible, and hard.

Don't you find that astonishing? They all acted as if they had seen nothing out of the ordinary. — "*They made their hearts as an adamant stone*" (Zechariah 7:12). They saw these things and hardened their hearts, like Pharaoh, and went on coolly with their callous business. — "*They took Jesus, bound Him, and led Him away!*"

Oh, how hard the heart of man is! Nothing can break it! Nothing can penetrate it! — Nothing but omnipotent grace! Bless God, there is hope for such hard hearts!

John Trapp, quoting one of the ancient writers, said, “The adamant stone is a legendary stone thought to be the hardest of all stones, harder than flint (Ezekiel 3:9), harder than the nether millstone (Job 41:24). Fire could not burn it, or even cause it to be heated throughout. It could not be broken by a hammer. Yet, this hardest of all stones, when soaked in a goat’s blood, is melted, dissolved, and broken. So the hardest heart of the most obstinate sinner is melted, dissolved, and broken when sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ, the sinner’s Scapegoat.”

That is our hope and prayer to God for sinners. If God the Holy Spirit sprinkles their hearts with the blood of Christ, if he will apply the blood to them, they will look upon him whom we have pierced and mourn. Miracles will never penetrate fallen man’s hard heart. Acts of divine judgment will never break the heart of stone. Affliction will never break it. The law can never break it. Hell itself cannot break the rebel heart of man. But the blood of Christ can!

Amazing Condescension

Third, we have before us a marvelous display of the amazing condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the Son of God, our Creator, the Sovereign of the universe, taken prisoner and led away, bound like a common malefactor. He is arraigned before wicked and unjust judges. He is insulted and treated with contempt. He had only to will his deliverance, and he would at once have been free. He had only to command the confusion of his enemies, and they would at once have been confounded.

This Man, Christ Jesus, is the Judge before whose bar Annas and Caiaphas, and all their companions must soon stand, from whom they shall receive a sentence of everlasting damnation. Yet, he condescended to be treated as a malefactor without resisting. — *“They took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away”* (vv. 12-13). Imagine that! When he was led away to slaughter, and bound with the sins of his people, our blessed Savior was led without the camp, to suffer without the gate (Hebrews 13:12). Isaiah tells us that he was *“taken from prison and from judgment”* when the Lord God *“laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6-8). — Deity was arrested that guilty sinners might never be arrested by God’s law! — Like the sacrifices of old, Christ our Sacrifice was bound to the altar with cords, pinioned and manacled by cords of divine justice as a common malefactor, that common malefactors might never be! — The Lord Jesus was bound for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, that we by his bondage from chains of darkness might be set free!

Truly the love of Christ to poor sinners is *“a love that passeth knowledge!”* To suffer for those we love, those who are in some sense worthy of our affection, is suffering that we can understand. To submit to ill-treatment quietly, when we have no power to resist, is submission that is both graceful and wise. But to suffer voluntarily, when you have the power to prevent it, and to suffer for a people who crave your blood, unasked, unwanted, and unthanked, that is *“love that passeth knowledge!”*

Our Lord Jesus was led away captive and dragged before the high priest’s bar, not because he could not help himself, but because he had set his whole heart upon us from eternity. By bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, by being made sin for us, and by being punished in our stead, the Son of God was determined to ransom our souls.

He was a willing prisoner, that we might be set free. He was willingly arraigned and condemned, that we might be absolved and declared innocent. *“He suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.”* — *“Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.”* — *“He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!”*

Substitution is the very heart of the Gospel. Our dear Savior suffered and died willingly and unresistingly, because he had come into this world as our Substitute and Surety, determined by substitutionary

atonement to purchase our eternal salvation. In all things, our Lord Jesus humbled himself to be both our Substitute and our Example (1 Peter 2:21-25; Philippians 2:5-8).

Our dear Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, was our Example in his life and in his death. He said he was our Example in washing the disciples' feet. Our Savior, by his meekness in suffering for us, made himself an Example for us to follow in suffering. And our Lord Jesus was the Example, the Standard, for all preachers to follow. Look at what he said to Caiaphas about his preaching (vv. 19-21).

“The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.”

Faithful preachers conceal nothing. They preach the Gospel with great plainness of speech, determined to be understood. If you want to know what a faithful preacher believes, all you have to do is ask those who hear them.

Abiding Sinfulness

Fourth, God the Spirit here sets before us an undeniable display of the abiding sinfulness that is to be found in all true believers, the corruption that yet remains in every true Christian, and will remain in us as long as we are in this world, in this body of flesh. We see this fact strikingly exemplified in the conduct of the Apostle Peter. There is Peter, that strong, faithful, believing man, forsaking his Master, and acting like a reprobate wretch! There he is running away when he ought to have stood by his Master's side. Do you see him, ashamed to own his Lord when he ought to have confessed him? Hear him three times denying that he knew his Savior. And all this took place immediately after receiving the Lord's' Supper, after hearing the Savior's last discourse, after hearing the plainest possible warnings, after hearing his Savior pray that great prayer as his High Priest that is recorded in the previous chapter, having nothing to gain by his denial!

“*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!*” — Peter's fall is recorded in the Book of God repeatedly, because it is intended to be a lesson to us all. Saved sinners are sinners still. Our only righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. Our only hope before God is Christ. — His Obedience! — His Blood! — His Intercession! Salvation, from start to finish, is by grace alone!

Abounding Grace

The *fifth* thing set before us in this event is the unfailing, immutable, abounding grace of God our Savior. — “*Where sin abounded grace did much more abound; That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 5:20-21). Peter truly loved the Lord Jesus, though he often acted otherwise. So it is with you and me! Peter denied Christ three times; but the Lord Jesus has not denied Peter. So it is with you and me! The Lord Jesus restored Peter by an act of his own free grace; otherwise Peter would never have returned to him. So it is with you and me! Peter did not reap what he sowed. He was not forsaken of God. Christ, his Substitute, reaped what Peter sowed. He was forsaken of God for Peter's sake. So it is with you and me! — We are great sinners; and our Lord Jesus Christ is a great Savior! In Him the grace of God superabounds!

Chapter 119
“To this End was I Born”

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all*. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.”

(John 18:28-40)

We have seen our Lord Jesus arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, drug as a thief along the dark streets to Annas and then to the palace of Caiaphas the high priest, where he was mocked, slapped, and falsely accused by his foes, and denied by one of his beloved disciples. Then, he is led from Caiaphas’ palace to the hall of judgment to be judged by Pilate, the Roman administrator placed over Jerusalem.

You will search the pages of history in vain to find another instance of a person charged with a capital offence arraigned before two different tribunals in a matter of hours. This aspect of our Lord’s trial is made even more extraordinary by the fact that he was arraigned before the courts of two nationalities: the one was Jewish and the other Roman. And the courts were of different orders: one was ecclesiastical and the other civil. He was arraigned first before the Jewish Sanhedrin, over which Caiaphas presided, he being “*the high priest the same year*” (John 11:49), and then before the Roman court. And so it must have been in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled which foretold the manner of his death.

The closing events of our Lord’s life were clearly foretold by the prophets. Thus in the second Psalm we read, “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his Christ, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*” There is no uncertainty as to the fulfilment of this prophecy; for the disciples, after reciting these verses of the Psalm, said, “*For a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou has anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*” (Acts 4: 24-28).

Thus the great confederacy of Jews and Gentiles, kings of the earth and rulers, having set themselves in defiance against Jehovah and against his Christ, succeeded only in accomplishing what the Triune Jehovah had in his eternal counsels decreed before to be done. From the very beginning of time, by all the types and shadows of the law, through all the writings of the Old Testament prophets, throughout the earthly life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through all the preaching and writings of the Apostles, in all the Book of God, the Lord God revealed to fallen, sinful, hell-bent, hell-deserving sinners the only possible way of salvation for fallen man is the way of the cross, the way of Christ’s death and resurrection as the sinners’ Substitute.

I must needs go home by the way of the cross,
There's no other way but this;
I shall ne'er get sight of the gates of light,
If the way of the cross I miss.

I must walk by faith in the strait, narrow way, —
Faith in his atoning blood!
I can never stand in God's Promised Land,
But by the merit of his blood!

The Christ of God must needs have suffered all those things he suffered, in every detail, before he could enter into his promised glory and be the Savior of his people (Luke 24: 25-27).

The blood-thirsty Sanhedrim stayed up all night so that they could plot their course and get the Lord Jesus over to Pilate's judgment hall as early as possible. How they thirsted for his blood! But his thirst was greater than theirs. He thirsted to drink the cup of the Father's wrath for us. He thirsted to drink of that cup for us to very dregs of utmost bitterness, that he might, with one tremendous draft of love drink damnation dry!

Stunning Hypocrisy

First, in verses 28-31 we see a stunning display of hypocrisy. Here is a band of religious zealots, the religious leaders of Israel, the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Pharisees, the Sanhedrim and the high priest of Israel, all plotting together to murder the Lord of Glory, a man whom they knew to be completely innocent of any offence. Yet, they were fearful of being ceremonially defiled by going into the judgment hall!

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.” (John 18:28-30)

These hardened men were engaged in doing the most abominably wicked thing mortal man ever did. They were in the process of murdering the Messiah. Yet, they talked of being “*defiled*,” and were very fastidious about the rules for keeping the passover! Our Lord Jesus rightly identified them as hypocrites and vipers.

The conscience of man is as fallen, depraved, and wicked as the rest of our nature. Sometimes it is hardened, seared, dead, and feels nothing. At other times, it is morbidly scrupulous about the matters of religious ceremony and tradition. It is not at all uncommon to find people excessively meticulous about trifling forms and outward ceremonies, while they are detestably immoral. Robbers and murderers are sometimes extremely strict about confessions, and absolutions, and prayers to saints. Fastings and self-imposed austerities in Lent are often followed by vile ungodliness when Lent is over. There is but a step from Lent to Carnival. People who know they are wrong in one direction, often struggle to make things appear right by excess of zeal in another direction. — That very zeal is the show of their hypocrisy and their condemnation.

Any form of religion that causes people focus on outward forms, rites, sacraments, and ceremonies is, to say the least, very suspicious. It may be accompanied by immense zeal and a show of earnestness, but it is not sound. The Pharisees paid tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, and compassed sea and land to make proselytes, while they neglected “*judgment, mercy, and faith*” (Matthew 23:23).

Hypocrisy is always mean-spirited and dishonest, though it always seeks to make a show of gentleness, meekness, and brotherly love. These Jews knew that the Lord Jesus had done nothing amiss, that he was completely innocent of all their trumped up and falsified charges. Yet, they said to Pilate, “*If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee*” (v. 30).

Envy and covetousness, and jealousy and greed are always the motives by which hypocrites are moved to action. The Jews who thirsted for Christ’s blood, feared the defilement of a Roman judgment hall, and made much ado about keeping the passover! They were moved by envy, covetousness, jealousy, and greed. Let their conduct be a beacon to Christians, as long as the world stands. That religion is worth nothing which does not make us say with David, “*I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way*” (Psalm 119:128). That Christianity is worthless which supplants heart worship, heart faith, and heart devotion with an outward show.

God’s saints are not hypocrites, but men and women who worship and serve God and one another in sincerity and truth (Philippians 3:3). True faith is “*faith which worketh by love.*” — “*Man looketh on the outward appearance.*” — “*The Lord looketh on the heart!*”

Prophecy Fulfilled

Second, God’s overruling providence compelled the Jews, as they were scheming to crucify the Lord of Glory, to bear witness to him whom they crucified (vv. 31-32).

“Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.” (John 18:31-32)

In verse 31, by acknowledging that they were not allowed by Roman law to execute a criminal, the Jewish Sanhedrim acknowledged that the scepter of civil government had departed from Judah, and that the time of the Redeemer’s revelation had come (Genesis 49:10).

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be].”

“*Shiloh*” is one of the names by which the Messiah was called in the Old Testament. It means “quiet,” “peaceable,” and “prosperous.” What a great name for our Savior, who came to make peace between God and men by the blood of his cross! He and he alone gives peace to men. He obtained peace for us. He gives peace to us. And he is our Peace!

In verse 32 we are told that the Jews did everything they did with regard to our Savior’s crucifixion, “*That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, signifying what death he should die.*” Our Lord Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he must be delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Gentiles, that he might be lifted up from the earth, as the serpent upon the pole (Matthew 20:19; John 12:32, 33, 3:14-16). The Lord God brought it to pass. Both the Jews and the Romans did exactly what the Lord decreed and said they would do, no more and no less.

Spiritual Kingdom

Third, in verses 33-36 our Lord Jesus shows us clearly that his Kingdom is altogether spiritual.

“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it

thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:33-36)

That is what the Son of God himself has to say about the kingdom of God. His kingdom is not of this world. It is not a carnal, political, civil kingdom. It is not established by worldly power or worldly means. It is not like any earthly kingdom. The kingdom of God is altogether spiritual.

Almost everything we hear preachers say or read from the writings of men about the kingdom of God is totally false. All the popular books about the coming of the kingdom of God and the end of the world promote nothing but carnal notions about future things. Almost everything to be found in the notes of reference Bibles and study Bibles about prophetic things is false. Obviously, I have not read them all; but I have read a few, and I have not yet read even one that sets forth the teaching of Holy Scripture about the kingdom of God. I urge you to ignore such religious tomfoolery.

And if what I have to say here is not verified by the Word of God, count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery. I will go further than that. — If what I have to say to you in this message is not exactly what God says in his Word about his kingdom, ignore me and count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery.

In Luke our Lord Jesus was accosted by the Pharisees’ questioning him about his kingdom; and he answered them plainly.

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see [it]. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after [them], nor follow [them]. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one [part] under heaven, shineth unto the other [part] under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.” (Luke 17:20-25)

Everything the Pharisees asked our Lord was asked with an evil motive. They never asked anything that they might learn, but only that they might accuse the Lord Jesus of some evil by twisting his words, or deride our Savior’s doctrine. But here, they went even further; they “*demanded*” him! What arrogance! What presumption! What hellishness of heart is exposed when sinful men dare to demand anything from the God of Glory! Yet, those who made this demand pretended to be the only true worshippers of God!

The word translated “*demanded*” means “accosted” or “interrogated.” All the Jews, including the Pharisees, were looking for the coming of the kingdom of God. They were looking for the promised Messiah to come and establish his kingdom on earth, making them the rulers over all the world. But this demand has the tone of derision in it. It is as if they said, “You tell us you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the King. If that is true, where is the kingdom? Do you really expect anyone to believe that such a poor, common man, a man known to keep company with sinners is the Christ of God? How long do you expect us to wait for this kingdom of yours to appear?”

Our Lord Jesus seized the occasion given him by their derision to teach his own disciples and all future disciples some blessed Gospel truths. First, he says, “*The kingdom of God cometh not with observation*” (v. 20). I can almost picture the puzzled look of utter ignorance upon the faces of those ignorant Pharisees. Our Lord

answered these fools according to their folly, only to make them more ignorant, only to give them greater confusion.

Yet, he was at the same time teaching his own disciples who were in the crowd that day, and teaching his disciples of all future days. How Peter, James, and John must have perked up their ears. Mary Magdalene, I am sure, came to a dead silence. — *“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”*

What does that mean? It means that the kingdom of God is not at all like any earthly kingdom. Its coming cannot be observed by the eye, by observing signs, marking dates, measuring time, or checking off fulfilled prophecy. Its presence cannot be observed by carnal means, because it is not carnal, but spiritual. Those who expect to observe anything of this kind are sure to be disappointed. They wait and watch in vain for a carnal, material kingdom that will never come, just as the Pharisees did. The Lord Jesus says, *“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”* These three things, at least, are meant by our Redeemer’s words.

1. The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and pageantry. It does not come with an outward show of any kind. In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, “The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show.”
2. The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men can observe it. God’s kingdom is a kingdom no one can see, except he be born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by the new birth (John 3:3, 5). No one can discern anything at all about this kingdom, except those who are taught of God and have the mind of Christ (John 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16).
3. Our Lord’s words in Luke 17:20 also mean, perhaps primarily mean, that the Kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances. The kingdom of God does not come by observing holy days and doing holy things. You do not get into the kingdom of God by receiving imaginary sacraments and doing imaginary good works. The kingdom of God is not a matter of religious dos and taboos (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:20-23). The fact is, if you and I see something that so greatly impresses our eyes, our natural senses, and/or our feelings that we are by what we see inclined to think, “Surely, the kingdom of God is here,” we are wrong, dead wrong.

Christ’s Mission

Fourth, in the 37th verse of John 18, our Savior declares his mission. — *“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”* He was born at Bethlehem to die in the place of his people upon Mt. Calvary. He came into the world to bear witness of the truth: the whole Gospel, the Word of Truth. He came to show us the glory of God, to show us God himself. He came to show us how God can be just and justify the ungodly. He came here to glorify the Triune God in the salvation of his people (Matthew 1:21). The Son of God came here *“to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* And everyone who is of the truth (of God, born of God and taught of God) hears his voice.

Pilate’s Declaration

Fifth, Pilate asserts publicly that our blessed Redeemer is without fault. — *“Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault [at all]”* (v. 38).

First, Pilate asked a sneering, scoffing question. — *“What is truth?”* He seems to say, as almost all men do today, “There is no such thing as truth. Truth is one thing to you and another thing to me. No man can tell another man that which is truth!” But that is not the case. *“All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth”* (Psalm 25:10). The Scriptures speak repeatedly of *“thy truth,”* as if to tell us that all truth is wrapped up in one thing. — *“For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds”* (Psalm 57:10). Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Truth that sprang out of the earth in his incarnation, in his resurrection, and in his

ascension (Psalms 85:10-11). Christ is the Truth by whom and in whom, by whom and with whom God is known.

Then, though he was but a scoffing pagan, Pilate was compelled by God to confess our Savior's perfect innocence before the law. — *"I find in him no fault at all!"* — He who is our Passover Sacrifice was and must be altogether without fault before the law. Only he who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners could be made sin for us and make us the righteousness of God by the sacrifice of himself.

Substitution Portrayed

Sixth, this chapter closes with a clear, instructive picture of substitution (vv. 39-40). Here is a picture of the Truth.

“But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.” (John 18:39-40)

Barabbas was a robber. So are we! You and I have robbed God of his glory and our souls of life and happiness. The Son of God died in Barabbas' place, crucified by wicked hands and slain. Blessed be his name forever, the Son of God died in the place of sinners! Barabbas was released at the passover, when the Lord Jesus died in his place. So were we.

What is truth? This is Truth: — God saves sinners by the sacrifice of his own darling Son. He does so justly and righteously, in strict accordance with truth (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21). And grace reigns *“through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 5:20-21).

“In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new Object struck my sight,
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

Sure never till my latest breath
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with his death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt and owned the guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

A second look He gave, which said,
'I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou may'st live.'

Thus while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of His grace, —
It seals my pardon too!”

—*John Newton*

Chapter 120
“**Pilate Sought to Release Him**”

“Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged *him*. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put *it* on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And *Pilate* saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify *him*: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.” (John 19:1-12)

In John 19:12 God the Holy Spirit tells us that “*Pilate sought to release*” the Lord Jesus. Pilate was the man who signed the order of execution; but the Spirit of God tells us that “*Pilate sought to release him.*” Pilate had no regard for God or for the things of God; but “*Pilate sought to release him.*” Without Pilate’s order the Lord Jesus would not have been crucified; but Pilate gave the order. Still, “*Pilate sought to release him.*” When I read those words, I have to ask, “Why, then, did Pilate issue the order of execution? Why did Pilate have the Lord of Glory crucified?” Only one answer can be given. — God ordained it before the world began and brought it to pass in providence.

Let all who read these lines understand that throughout this scene, indeed, throughout every scene of history, it is always the will of God that rules, never the will and devices of men.

God’s Sovereignty

There are countless illustrations of God’s absolute sovereignty in the Holy Scriptures. Everywhere the Book of God shouts, “*The heavens do rule!*” But nothing so marvelously and wondrously sets forth God’s absolute sovereignty as his sacrifice of his darling Son in the place of sinners at Calvary.

The Triune God purposed to save his people by the slaughter of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cursed tree before the worlds were made. The Lord God sovereignly ordered all the affairs of providence to bring it to pass, exactly according to his eternal purpose, by Pilate’s hand (Acts 4:27-28). When our Lord’s hour had come, when the due time had arrived when God would commend his love toward us in the sacrifice of his darling Son, Pilate gave the order and the hellish deed was performed. — The Son of God was murdered by the hands of wicked men! Thus, by the sacrifice of Himself, the Lamb of God obtained eternal redemption for sinners.

If you would have that salvation that Christ obtained by the shedding of his own precious blood, trust him. Believe on the Son of God and that salvation is yours. Faith is the evidence of redemption and of redemption applied.

I repeat, nothing displays God’s glorious sovereignty like the wondrous accomplishment of redemption by Christ. And, perhaps, the one aspect of our Lord’s crucifixion that shows God’s sovereign character as God is the fact that Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, gave the order of crucifixion. Let’s look at the record given in this passage of Inspiration.

Here we see our Lord Jesus Christ in Pilate's judgment hall. This passage presents us with a very strange event. — Here the Judge of all the earth stands to be judged of wicked men! — He that shall soon judge the world in righteousness is judged most unrighteously! — He that shall one day set upon the throne of judgment with ten thousands of his saints and angels, stands as a prisoner before the bar of men!

Justice Perverted

Never in the pages of history was justice so violently and deliberately abused. The Son of God was denied the rights of justice given to a common thief or murderer. Before one witness was produced to testify against him, before any evidence was weighed, the Lord of glory was beaten, mocked, stripped, and abused by the vile hatred of men.

Who can comprehend the depths of humiliation endured by the God-man? That One "*Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God,*" now "*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!*"

Judas made good on his bargain to betray our Lord. No sooner did he kiss the Savior than the chief priests and Pharisees had his hands bound and led him away. These wolves of the night thirsted for the blood of the Lamb of God. Their malice would not allow any delay. They could not sleep until they had his precious, innocent blood. Therefore, they resolved to kill him as soon as possible. But, so that it would not look like downright murder, they formalized it with a trial. You are familiar with the story.

Sequence of Events

Let me remind you of the events of that night. — Our Redeemer was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and hurried along the road which crosses the brook Kidron. Like David, who passed over that brook weeping as he went, our great David passed over the brook weeping as he went. The brook Kidron was that into which all the filth of the Temple sacrifices was thrown. And our dear Savior walked through that black stream as though he were some foul and filthy thing. He was led into Jerusalem by the sheep-gate, the gate through which the lambs of the Passover were always led. Little did those men understand that they were fulfilling to the very letter those types which God had ordained by the Law of Moses. These wicked men led the Lamb of God to slaughter.

May the Lord himself sanctify our hearts as we follow our Redeemer through his trial and cruel mockery. *First*, they led Immanuel to the house of Annas, the ex-high priest. There they made a brief call to gratify the blood thirsty wretch with the sight of his victim. Then they hurriedly brought the Son of God to the house of Caiaphas. There the members of the Sanhedrim were assembled, to take counsel against the Lord and against his Anointed. *Third*, they drug the Lamb of God through the streets to Pilate's judgment hall. There they sought a legal sentence of execution to be pronounced upon the Lord of Glory. *Fourth*, Pilate sent the blood thirsty crowd to Herod, the governor of Galilee. *Finally*, the Lord of Glory is returned to Pilate's judgment hall. Here he was tried, beaten, mocked, and sentenced to die. This is where we find him in John 19:1-12.

Pilate Overruled

You will not find a more striking and vivid demonstration of God's absolute sovereignty than in Pilate's treatment of the Lord Jesus. *First*, Pilate was assured of his innocence, acknowledging no less than seven times, "*I find no fault in him.*" *Second*, Pilate desired to release him (Luke 23:20, 22; John 19:12; Acts 3:13). — "*Third*, Pilate's wife urged him not to sentence the Lord Jesus, but to let him go (Matthew 27:19). *Fourth*, Pilate tried to bring about his acquittal, telling the Jews to judge him themselves (John 18:31). He sent him to Herod, only for Christ to be returned (Luke 23:7). He tried to get the Jews to have him execute Barabbas (John 18:39-

40). Yet, in the end, Pilate sentenced the Lord of Glory to be crucified! Why? Because thus it was ordained from eternity!

Man's will is nothing, when it runs contrary to of God's will! Here was Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, determined to release the Savior. Yet, he was prevented from doing so. From all eternity God had decreed that Pilate would sentence his Son to death; and all earth and hell combined could not thwart the purpose of the Almighty. He would not be all-mighty if they could! The Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, was "*delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23).

As God's servant, Peter fearlessly announced, "*Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*" (Acts 4:27-28). This is not simply "Calvinism," it is the explicit declaration of Holy Scripture; and woe be unto the one who dares to deny it. As Arthur Pink put it...

"Christ had to be sentenced by Pilate because the eternal counsels of Deity had foreordained it." The Lord Jesus died for sinners both of the Jews and of the Gentiles. Therefore Divine wisdom determined that both Jews and Gentiles have a direct hand in His death.

Many object to this. We are told, "Such doctrine reduces Pilate to a mere robot!" Were that the case, so be it. It is far, far better to reduce a man to a robot than to deny the Word of the living God and reduce the Almighty to something less than man. Whether we understand the teaching of Scripture or not, it is not ours to argue with or alter the Word of God, but to bow in absolute submission to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

Pilate's Responsibility

Yes, God is sovereign, always, everywhere, and in all things. Yet, every man is totally responsible for his own sin. The Gospel records present Pilate to us as a man responsible for his crimes against God. The Lord Jesus addressed himself to Pilate's conscience. — "*Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice*" (John 18:37). God faithfully warned him that the Savior was a just Man and to do nothing against him (Matthew 27:19). Finally, the Savior himself told Pilate that he was sinning in holding him (John 19:11).

See that you understand the teaching of Holy Scripture in this regard. — God is absolutely sovereign; and man is fully responsible. Let me show you five things in this passage of Holy Scripture.

Christ Mocked

First, in verses 1-3, the Spirit of God reminds us of our Savior's scourging and mockery as our Substitute.

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged *him*. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put [it] on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands."

Having failed in his attempt to release the Lord Jesus by forcing the Jews to choose between him and Barabbas, Pilate ordered the Lord to be scourged, stripped naked, tied to a post, and severely whipped. It appears from verse 12 that Pilate thought that the Jews might be satisfied with that torturous procedure. — "*And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.*" Let us never forget that even here, in Pilate's judgment hall, our dear Savior endured all that he endured as our Substitute, in our room and place (Psalm 89:30-34; Isaiah 53:5).

This scourging was followed by a mock coronation in the soldiers' hall (Matthew 27:26-31). The soldiers wanted to torture him and to mock him, particularly mocking the fact that he was said to be "*the King of the Jews.*" The cruel, thorny crown served both purposes. No doubt, that crown of thorns reaches back to Genesis 3:18 in connection with the thorns and thistles promised Adam's sons as a result of the fall. Our blessed Lord "*bore our sins in his own body on the tree.*" And, when he was made sin for us, the curse of our sins was made his. He became a curse for us! — "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree*" (Galatians 3:13).

Then the soldiers threw a purple robe over his shoulders, put a reed in his hand to represent a king's sceptre (Genesis 49:10), and mockingly marched around him, beating him with their fists, spitting upon him, and saying, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*"

Our Savior was delivered to Pilate charged with making himself King. He was mocked by the soldiers as a king, and he was crucified with this charge written over his head: "The King of the Jews." He is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is owned, received, and acknowledged as such by all who are saved by his grace (Romans 10:9-10). And one day every creature in heaven, earth, and hell will bow before him and acknowledge him as King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:9-11).

Innocence Proclaimed

Second, our Savior's perfect innocence is publicly proclaimed. — "*Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him*" (v. 4). Pilate was a troubled, confused man. He was afraid of this man, Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:19). He did not want to get the Jews stirred up against him. He was worried that word of this tumult might reach Caesar's ears and endanger his position. When he found no fault in the Lord Jesus, knowing the Jews had an evil motive in the whole affair (Matthew 27:18), he tried one more scheme. Pilate went out before the people and said, "*Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.*" I remind you that Pilate publicly proclaimed our Savior's innocence no less than seven times (John 18:38; 19:4; 19:6 — Compare Exodus 12:5; Deuteronomy 17:1; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

"Behold the Man"

Third, there is a striking sentence in verse 5 that demands our attention. — "*Behold the Man!*" No doubt, Pilate hoped to stir some sympathy and compassion in this mob by pointing to the Lord Jesus, as he stood before them beaten, covered with his own blood and the foul spit of men, crowned with thorns, and wearing a purple rag, and said, "*Behold the Man!*" I do not doubt at all that Pilate was saying, "Look at him. He is a man like you. Surely, He deserves some sympathy." But there is much more here than Pilate's intention.

There stood the Lord of Glory, our God-man Mediator, our Substitute and Surety, wearing the crown of thorns, the mocking robe, bloody and beaten, his face and body marred as no other man (Isaiah 52:14). I say to you, "*Behold the Man!*" Christ is the Man spoken of throughout the Book of God (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12). He is the sinless Man, the suffering Man, the substitute Man (1 Timothy 2:5), the sympathizing Man, the sovereign Man, the saving Man!

Notice that in verse 5 "*Pilate*" is italicized. His name was added here by our translators. So, if we read verse 5 omitting Pilate's name, it may convey another message altogether. — "*Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe, and saith unto them, Behold the man!*"

If it was the Lord Jesus himself who said, "*Behold the man,*" the text has another meaning altogether. How often in the Old Testament we see our Savior calling us to behold him. — "*Behold me! Behold me!*" (Isaiah 65:1). — "*Look unto me, and be ye saved*" (Isaiah 45:22). God the Father calls for us to behold this Man

as his Righteous Servant and our unfailing Savior (Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 12:18). God the Holy Spirit gives us the same sweet call (John 1:29, 36).

When the Lord Jesus came forth before the chief priests and rulers, having given “*his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair,*” as the Prophet said he would, our ever-gracious, all-glorious Christ calls upon the very sinners who heaped such foul cruelties upon him to “*Behold the Man!*” Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you eyes of faith to “*Behold the Man*” (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1). Blessed Holy Spirit, graciously cause me ever to “*Behold the Man,*” to so behold him that my whole heart erupts in ever-increasing faith in and love for Him who loved me and gave himself for me!

Pilate’s Fear

Fourth, we see the judge and executioner trembling before the One he condemned (vv. 6-9).

“When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify *him*: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.”

It was not the people, but the chief priests and officers of the temple who cried, “*Crucify him! Crucify him!*” These were men who made great pretensions to piety and religion. They were the religious leaders of the nation. How wicked is the unregenerate heart, especially when it is clothed in religious garb!

Pilate said, “You crucify him, for I find no fault in Him.” Again, Pilate declared our Lord’s innocence. By means of this wretched, worthless, wishy-washy politician, our God declared the innocence and holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21-22; Isaiah 53:9-10). Our Savior is the perfect man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. As such he is our Representative and our Righteousness before God (Romans 5:19; 1 Peter 3:18). In his holy life he honored the law of God for us; and in his death he satisfied Divine justice (Romans 4:25).

The Jews knew exactly what our Lord Jesus claimed about his eternal Deity. Liberals, Mormons, Russellites, and others may not be able to discern the meaning of his words, but the Jews did. They understood perfectly what the Lord Jesus had said to them (John 10:30-33). He declared himself to be God; and according to the law, if he were not God, as he claimed, he was to be put to death.

On top of all his other doubts and fears, this new revelation caused Pilate to be terrified. He must have thought, “Is it possible that this Man is related to Deity?” He remembered his wife’s dream and her warning. He knew that the Lord Jesus was innocent. He had heard of his life and miracles. He had to have been impressed with the Lord’s conduct throughout this whole affair. So Pilate took the Saviour back into the judgment hall and asked, “Where are you from?” But Christ gave him no answer. He deserved no answer! He had totally ignored every word our Lord spoke, compromised justice by scourging an innocent man, and had no other motive through it all except his own welfare.

Our Savior gave Pilate no answer, because he did not wish to escape the cross. He was willing to die for us, as our sin-atonement Substitute (Isaiah 53:7).

Sovereignty Asserted

Fifth, our Lord Jesus, even as he stood before Pilate as a common malefactor, wrongfully accused and unjustly condemned, asserted God’s sovereignty over his judge and executioner (vv. 10-12).

“Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.”

Pilate’s reply is natural. He is fearful and afraid. His conscience is troubling him. His whole domain is up in arms over this one Man; and being totally confused at the serenity and calmness of this Jesus, who refuses to defend himself while facing death on a cruel cross, he cried, “Do you stand in silence and refuse to answer me when you know that I have the power to crucify you or release you? How dare you! Do you know who I am and what power I have?” Our Lord replied, “You could have no power or authority over me at all, except the power my Father gives to you” (John 3:27; Acts 4:26-28).

Our Lord was saying that Pilate, as Pharaoh, was an instrument used by God to accomplish his purpose and glory, nothing more (Romans 9:17). Robert Hawker rightly observed...

“Jesus looked over the heads of all his foes, to eye the hand of Jehovah in this appointment. And it would be always well for you and for me, and for all the Lord’s people to do the same, in all the lesser considerations we meet with in life.”

Pilate’s sin was great; but the greater sin belonged to these religious leaders who so grossly sinned against the Scriptures they claimed to believe and the light God had given as they heard the Lord Jesus Christ speak (Luke 12:47-48). Israel knew the Scriptures concerning Messiah; Pilate did not; and the “*greater sin*” was committed by men who, with the Scriptures in their hands, had greater light.

Be warned! — Do not heap upon yourself the greater condemnation by trampling underfoot the blood of the Son of God, by crucifying the Lord Jesus afresh by your willful unbelief!

Pilate’s power was God-given power. Pilate’s power was “*from above.*” He was the governor of Judea because God made him governor. There is no power that is not of God. — “*The powers that be are ordained of God.*” The source of all earthly power is heavenly. It is not in man or from man, but from the King of kings, the Prince of the kings of the earth. The God of Glory put Pilate in his place when the fulness of time was come, so that his darling Son would be crucified by Roman law, as the Scriptures of the Old Testament and our Lord Jesus himself had declared he must be (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:26-30, 38-41).

“*Pilate sought to release Him,*” but he couldn’t because he was Jehovah’s Righteous Servant, Jehovah’s voluntary Bond-slave, who sought no release from service because of his love for his Master, his love for his wife, and his love for His children!

Chapter 121
“Behold the man!”

“Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And *Pilate* saith unto them, Behold the man!” (John 19:5)

Pilate, the cowardly, self-serving governor of Judea, has had the Lord Jesus scourged, severely beaten with a whip, by his soldiers. Those soldiers stripped him naked, platted a crown of thorns and shoved it into his holy head, put a purple rag on his immaculate shoulders, and stuck a reed for a mock scepter in his harmless hands. They mocked him, beat him with their fists, and spit all over him. Then, Pilate brought the Lord Jesus out before the Jews, the chief priests, and the Pharisees. When he did, Pilate said, “*Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him*” (v. 4). — “*Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And [Pilate] saith unto them, Behold the man!*”

I call your attention to the fact that the name of Pilate was added by our translators, as indicated by the fact that they put his name in italicized letters. So read the text without the name of Pilate added, and you will get another sense of the text altogether. — “*Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe and saith unto them, Behold the man!*”

The One speaking here is not Pilate, but the Lord Jesus himself. Pilate spoke in verse 4. — “*Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.*” But then, it is our blessed Savior who speaks. He who stood before Pilate in silence, he who spoke not a word to defend himself before the Jews, the chief priests, the Pharisees, the Roman soldiers, or Pilate, when he stepped forth before that crowd of guilty sinners whose hands dripped with his own precious blood, “*wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe,*” said — “*Behold the Man!*” Here, standing before you is the Man you said you have been looking for, the Man of God’s appointing, the Man of whom all the Scriptures speak. — “*Behold the Man!*”

Standing before this God-hating, satanically inspired mob of blood-thirsty religious men, men who were about to execute the most violent, lawless deed of history, is the Man for whom the world was made. The Man stood before them, who for three years had healed the sick and done deeds of mercy and kindness, who had revealed his supernatural power as God in countless displays of mercy. These men cried “Give us the murderer Barabbas! Crucify the Man, crucify him!” And here he stands. — His bleeding shoulders covered by the purple robe. — His head crowned with thorns. — His visage marred and smitten beyond recognition. — “*Behold the Man!*” That is the message of this Book; and that is my message God has sent his servants to proclaim to a lost world. — “*Behold the Man!*”

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Man of whom all the Scriptures speak, the Man by whom the Triune God saves fallen men.

Bible’s Message

“*Behold the Man!*” — That is the great message of the Bible. God’s revelation to man is all about one Man, the mediator Man, the God-man, the Man Christ Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, God says, “*Behold the Man!*” Throughout the Book of God, our Savior calls upon his chosen to behold him, to look to him in faith, to trust him, saying again and again, “*Behold the Man*” (Judges 13:10-11; Ezekiel 9:11; Zechariah 6:12-13).

Throughout the Old Testament, as in the New, the Triune Jehovah calls for us to behold this Man, who is God our Savior. God the Father says, “*Behold the Man*” (Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 12:18). God the Son says, “*Behold the Man*” (Isaiah 65:1; 45:20-22) And God the Holy Ghost says, “*Behold the Man*” (John 1:29, 36).

When the Lord Jesus came forth before the high priests and rulers of Israel, having given his back to the scourging and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, as the Prophet said he would, the Man Christ Jesus calls upon the multitude standing before him to "*Behold the Man!*" Yet, as the Prophet Isaiah also prophesied, he was "*despised and rejected of men*" (Isaiah 53:3).

May the Lord God pour upon you and upon me the Spirit of grace and supplication, that we may "*Behold the Man*" for sinners slain and live forever in the sweet awareness of his mercy, love, and grace (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1). "*Behold the Man!*" That's the message of this Book.

The Covenant Man

Behold our Lord Jesus Christ, the Covenant Man. He stood forth from everlasting as our covenant Surety, in whose image the first man Adam was made. Yes, I know that our Lord's human nature was created in time. His human body and soul were not from everlasting. Yet, he stood forth as our Covenant Head and Surety before the world began. We were from everlasting accepted and blessed of God in him (Ephesians 1:3-7).

The Promised Man

Behold the Lord Jesus, our Divine Savior, as he is set before us as the promised Man of the Old Testament Scriptures. Read the Book of Genesis, and "*Behold the Man!*" In the first chapter of Genesis, the earth was brought out of the deep waters of darkness, chaos, death, and judgment (Genesis 1:1-3). Then, at God's command, the earth brought forth vegetation and animal creation. All was garnished with beauty and glory. Finally, on the sixth day of creation, the Lord God created man in the person of our father Adam, and placed him in the Garden of Eden. The Lord God brought forth, out of the dust of the earth and by the breath of his Spirit, by direct creation, a creature which is his offspring. He said, "*Let us make man in our image, and after our own likeness;*" and he did it.

All three persons in the eternal Godhead were involved in this creative act. And one of the three, God the Son, knew that at an appointed day, "*in due time,*" "*when the fulness of time was come,*" he would take upon himself the nature of that man he created. He is the image of God in whose image Adam was created.

Adam was not a cave-man. He was not a ferocious half-ape/half-man. Adam was not an unintelligent brute. Adam was created in the image of God, filled with wisdom and knowledge. He possessed far greater knowledge than we have ever imagined. He had names for every beast of the field and of the forest. Without a moment's hesitation he named them. Tell me what 1000 men together could do so today!

Not only was he brilliant and physically perfect, Adam lived every day in sweet fellowship with the triune God. He enjoyed God's presence all the time, and reigned as king over all the earth.

But soon the scene changed. Adam sinned. He abandoned God in an act of angry rebellion. And fallen man was cursed, cast out of the Garden, and sentenced to death. Doomed to live, generation after generation, under the curse of the fall, in sin, in the sweat of his brow, upon an earth cursed with briars, and thorns, and rocks, and pain, and sickness, and death! There is man: fallen, stripped, lost, ever running and hiding from God! Deeper and deeper he sinks. Sin drags him lower and lower. Darker becomes the night.

But will the Lord God leave him there? Just before he drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden, he promised a Man, a Man to be born of a virgin, the Woman's Seed, by whom he would redeem and save his people. — "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Genesis 3:15). Then the Lord God showed the fallen pair how he would save them by that Man, Christ Jesus, whom he would send into the world. — "*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them*" (Genesis 3:21).

From that day on, chosen men, called by grace, lived by faith in that Man who was to come, in and by whom redemption must be accomplished. Throughout the ages of Old Testament history and throughout the writings of Israel's prophets, the Lord God, — (The Lord Jesus Christ stood forth as he did at last in Pilate's judgment hall) — and said, "*Behold the Man!*" In prophetic promises and redemption prophecies, the Lord God pointed fallen man to the last Man, the Seed of the woman, and for four thousand years cried out to fallen, guilty sinners, "*Behold the Man!*" — "*Behold My Servant!*" — "*Behold the Branch!*" — "*Behold the King!*" — "*Behold Immanuel!*"

"*Behold the Man!*" — God comes down to man as a Man, to suffer, to die, to take sin upon himself, to be the Sin-bearer and Sin Offering for his people! "*Behold he cometh,*" the Lamb of God, to take away sin and sorrow, the curse and the crying, the guilt and the shame, the ruin and the death that plagues fallen man! He comes, that Man, to undo all that the first man Adam did, to restore that which he took not away! — "*Behold the Man!*" That is the message of the Book of God. The Man comes, the One from above, the deathless One, the One who was, and is, and is to come, — "*Behold the Man*" comes to suffer death and to conquer death, hell, and the grave by the sacrifice of himself, to put away sin by being made sin, to remove the curse by being made a curse! — "*Behold the Man!*"

The God-Man

Read the first chapter of John's Gospel, and behold the Man again. Here we behold him as the God-man.

(John 1:1-3) "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 any thing made that was made."

(John 1:14) "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

If there is any verse in the Bible marked with the special emphasis by God the Holy Spirit, surely it is John 1:14. Every word is of immense importance. Here is the glorious person so highly spoken of in the preceding 13 verses of this chapter. The Word who is God is declared to be "*made flesh.*" God the Son was "*made flesh.*"

The word translated "*flesh*" is very strong. The same word is used in Romans 3:20, where we are told no flesh can be justified by the deeds of the law. In Romans 8:3 Christ is said to have been made "*in the likeness of sinful flesh.*" The word here translated "*flesh*" has the same significance as the Hebrew words used in Genesis 6:12 to speak of "*corrupt*" flesh. John could not have used a stronger, more emphatic word to speak of our Savior's great condescension and humiliation in assuming our nature. Had John merely said, "*The Word was made man,*" the meaning would not have been so emphatic a declaration of degradation. (Philippians 2:5-8).

"*The Word was made flesh!*" — The Son of God was made what we are, made to be our full nature, body and soul, a complete man. He who is God became man. He did not cease to be God; but he took our human nature into union with his Divine nature, so that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and Man, the God-man, our Mediator. "*The Word was made flesh,*" as Augustine put it in the 4th century, "Not by changing what he was, but by taking what he was not." This union of God and Man in one person is indissoluble and forever. Jesus Christ our Savior, our God-man Mediator is "*the same yesterday, and today, and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8).

I have no idea what the length, breadth, height or depth of what I am about to say is; but I cannot help linking these words to those of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:30. — "*The Word was made flesh;*" and "*we are*

members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!" So is it now, so it has been in all ages of the Church, and so it shall be forever! — *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Representative Man

As we open the Word of God and behold the man Christ Jesus, we have understood nothing until we have been made to see that he is the Representative Man and trust him as such. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit teach you this. — *"Behold the Man,"* the Representative Man, our Savior!

"Behold the Man!" — Thus speaks the Holy Spirit of God in the Gospels. Behold him in his submission to the will of God. Behold him in the display of his power. Listen to his words of eternal life. Behold him in his sinlessness, his perfection, and his loveliness.

But he came for something greater than to live on earth as the perfect man and make the invisible One visible in his person. John the Baptist in his God-given witness states the great truth. — *"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."* *"Behold the Man"* in his life of obedience as our Representative, bringing in everlasting righteousness. And *"Behold the Man"* in his agony, sufferings, and death, as he was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. — *"Behold the Man"* our Substitute and Surety (Romans 5:12, 18-19; 5:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

"Behold the Man" in Gethsemane. — The first man was in a Garden of delight, the last Man must also go into a Garden, a Garden of grief. It is Gethsemane, the Garden of sorrow and bloody sweat. We hear the weeping and the wailing, the strong cries and the tears (Hebrews 5). — *"Behold the Man"* in agony, sweating blood! Now he is what he said in Psalm 22 — *"I am a worm, and no a man!"* The Man of Life and Glory becomes the willing captive of cruel men.

"Behold the Man" at Gabbatha. — And after all the dishonor done to him, the cruel scourging, they look upon him with hearts filled with satanic hatred. Here in John 19, we see the Lord Jesus suffering horrid reproach still. Here, at Gabbatha, the Son of God was assaulted by men, by sinners, by the will and the hands of foul, wicked men. Here, at Gabbatha, at Pilate's judgment hall, the Lord Jesus, who was betrayed by his own familiar friend in Gethsemane, was scourged (Matthew 27:26). — *"The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows"* (Psalm 129:3). He was mocked by the soldiers and crowned with thorns (Matthew 27:26-29). His beard was plucked from his face (Isaiah 50:6). And here he was condemned to die (John 19:13-16). But our Lord's reproach, our reproach, the reproach of our guilt and sin, the reproach which broke his heart was not over yet.

"Behold the Man" on Golgotha. — The Man is nailed to the cursed tree. Where was it done? Not as a hymn says, "There is a green hill far away, without the city wall," but Scripture says, *"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden"* (John 19:41). The crown of thorns is still upon his blessed head, the head which rested in all eternity upon the Father's bosom. He bears the curse. He bears the shame, bearing our sin in his own body. He makes atonement and satisfies God's infinite justice. — *"He who knew no sin was made sin for us."* He bows his thorn-crowned head, and his lips give the great shout of victory, *"It is finished!"* *"Behold the Man,"* our sovereign, successful, satisfied Substitute!

"Behold the Man!" — *"Behold the Lamb of God!"* — He has finished his work. Peace has been made by the blood of the cross! *"Behold the Man!"* He is the One, the only One who saves. He has made the new and living way into God's glorious presence. *"Behold the Man!"* Oh, may God give you grace to behold him, to trust him!

The Risen Man

“*Behold the Man,*” the Risen Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither [was any] deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put [him] to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see [his] seed, he shall prolong [his] days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, [and] shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 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: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:9-12)

“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only [so], but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only [so], but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” (Romans 4:25-5:11)

“*Behold the Man!*” — The grave is empty. There he stands, that Man who had died, Victor over death, hell, and the grave. He has conquered them forever. He is not a spirit, nor a phantom. “*Behold the Man,*” the Head of the new creation, the Firstborn among many brethren!

The Ascended Man

“*Behold the Man,*” the Ascended Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. We look up. He has ascended upon high. He passed through the heavens. The power of God lifted up the Man and carried him into the third heaven, into the highest height of all the heavens. We look up and see “*Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and with honor.*” He sits there at the right hand of God. Far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named. Yonder he sits, the Man, the Man who lived, who died, who was buried, and who rose again. O glorious vision! Oh, for faith to see him in that highest glory, having Divine assurance that we, redeemed by him, one with him, shall possess with him the glories above. “*Behold the Man!*” Your great High Priest, your loving Advocate with the Father. “*Behold the Man!*” The head of the body, the coming Bridegroom. “*Behold the Man*” with all power to give eternal life to chosen, redeemed, helpless sinners! “*Behold the Man!*” — “*He must reign!*” “*Behold the Man*” interceding as your Advocate on High!

The Coming Man

“*Behold the Man,*” the Coming Man. — “*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. Even so, Amen*” (Revelation 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 1 Corinthians 15:49-58).

Soon everything is going to be far different. I see the Man, my Redeemer. I see him leaving the Father’s side. He arises from his glorious place. He leaves the mediatorial place. He descends once more. He comes to

the air, and gives the commanding shout, the shout which opens the graves of his own, the shout which will gather all his saints together to meet him face to face, to receive the travail of his soul. — “*Behold the Man!*” We shall “*see him as he is, and shall be like him.*” Imagine that! What vision it will be! We shall not see him as the mob saw him, at Gabbatha and Golgotha, but we shall see him in all the fulness of all his glory!

With the enthroned Christ, we shall reign as kings forever! The crown rights over the earth are his. The last Man will restore a ruined creation. There will be a great regeneration. His mighty power will banish the curse. His heel has crushed the serpent’s head; and he shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly! — “*Behold the Man!*” “He is upon the throne to rule and reign in righteousness. — “*Behold the Man!*” — The Covenant Man — The Promised Man — The God-Man — The Representative Man — The Risen Man — The Ascended Man — The Coming Man!

“*Behold the Man!*” and live forever! — “*Behold the Man!*” I see the Lord Jesus standing there in the judgment hall, stretching forth his slashed, bruised, bleeding arms, and hear him saying, “*Behold the Man!*” Those words are spoken as a call to faith, a call to utter devotion, and a call to holy communion.

Chapter 122
The Crucifixion of our Lord

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led *him* away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, *and* Greek, *and* Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also *his* coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” (John 19:13-37)

How great the love of Christ must be! He voluntarily endured all the agonies of Calvary, all the agonies of death as the cursed one of God upon the cursed tree, for the salvation of poor sinners like you and me!

What a horrid, evil thing sin must be! It could not be atoned for, it could not be forgiven, it could not be removed and washed away, not even by God himself, without the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Substitute.

This part of John’s Gospel gives us information about our Savior’s crucifixion and death at Calvary that is not revealed by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We are not told why one of the other Gospel writers was inspired to include certain things others were inspired to omit; and we do not need to know why. We are content to know that, both in what they recorded and in what they omitted, all four of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) wrote by inspiration of God.

These verses describe the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was made sin for us and hanged upon the cursed tree. John’s brief record of our Lord’s crucifixion is not to be read casually, but with great thoughtfulness and adoration. This is an inspired record of the most amazing thing in history. It is amazing and

marvelous in our eyes when we remember who suffered these things. It was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the only truly holy and good man ever to live in this world, the incarnate God, our Savior! It is amazing and marvelous in our eyes when we remember, too, for whom he suffered (Romans 5:6-8), and why. The cause of his great sorrow and agony of body, soul, and spirit was the fact that the Son of God suffered for sin as the sin-bearer. — *“Christ died for our sins!”*

Gethsemane

We have seen our Savior’s sorrow in Gethsemane, when he prayed three times, *“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”* Such was the shock of his holy soul at the thought and prospect of being made sin that our Redeemer broke out into a sweat of blood. Luke describes it in these words: *“Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44).

Gabbatha

We have seen the scourging of Gabbatha, too. Our Lord was condemned in a mockery of justice at Pilate’s judgment hall, called Gabbatha. There he was delivered into the hands of cruel, barbaric Roman soldiers to be scourged. They took him into the common judgment hall where they gathered an entire band of soldiers, between five and twelve hundred of them, to scourge our Savior. They stripped Him. They mercilessly whipped him with a Roman scourge. They mocked him, shoving a crown of thorns into his brow, throwing a purple rag over his shoulders, and putting a reed in his hand, they spit all over him and beat him with their fists!

Golgotha

“Then they led him away to crucify him!” — After our Lord was paraded through the streets of Jerusalem as a common criminal, we behold the slaughter at Golgotha. — *“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called [the place] of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha”* (v. 17). Hanging upon the cursed tree on Golgotha’s hill, the Lord of Glory suffered and died in the place of poor, ruined sinners, that sinners like you and me might live forever with God.

“Golgotha” means “place of a skull.” This was just another name for Calvary. It was called Golgotha because in this place of slaughter people who were stoned to death or crucified were simply covered over with a little dirt. Consequently, in a matter of time skulls and bones were everywhere. But the place of execution is insignificant. The only matters of importance are — Who is this sufferer? — Why was he made to suffer this horrid, cursed death? — For whom did he suffer and die? — What did he accomplish by his death?

If you could find the actual spot where Christ died and the actual cross on which he was crucified, it would be of no benefit to your soul. You will never find redemption, salvation, and the forgiveness of sin in “holy places” and religious relics (2 Kings 18:1-4).

Bearing His Cross

The *first* thing to which I would call your attention is the fact that our blessed Savior went forth from the judgment hall to Golgotha bearing his cross (vv. 16-17).

“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led [him] away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called [the place] of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.”

One portion of the punishment imposed on the vilest criminals was that they were required to carry their own cross when they went to execution. Thus, our Lord Jesus went forth from the judgment hall “*bearing his cross,*” because he was, in the fullest sense, made sin for us, numbered with the transgressors, reckoned a sinner, and counted a curse for our sakes!

For another thing, this was a fulfillment of the great type of the sin-offering of the Mosaic law. It is written, — “*The bullock [for] the sin offering, and the goat [for] the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy [place], shall [one] carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung*” (Leviticus 16:27).

Little did the blinded Jews imagine, when they madly hounded on the Romans to crucify the Lord Jesus outside the gates, that they were unconsciously perfecting the mightiest sin-offering that was ever seen. It is written, “*Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate*” (Hebrews 13:12).

Like our Master, let us be content to go forth “*outside the camp,*” bearing his reproach. Multitudes wear crosses around their necks, as lapel pins, tie tacks, or earrings. Multitudes put crosses on graves, erect crosses on hillsides, and put crosses on stickers. Churches everywhere have crosses on their buildings, and in them. All that is easy and cheap and meaningless! — Believers bear the cross. Like our Master, we must be willing to take up our cross daily and follow him. If we are persecuted for our doctrine, so be it. If we are derided for our simplicity of worship, so be it. If we are mocked for our Lord’s ordinances, so be it. If we are counted the filth and off-scouring of the earth for our dogmatism and separation from the world, so be it (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

Crucified King

Second, the Holy Spirit tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified as a King, as “*the King of the Jews*” (vv. 13-14, 19-22). He who hung on the central cross of the three on Golgotha’s hill had a royal title over his head: — “*JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.*” Because God ordered it, Pilate wrote out the inscription and stood by it. The inscription was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that it might be read by all Jews, Greeks, and Romans, because our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the Savior of men of every nation and the King of all (Philippians 2:9-11).

Even before our Savior was born, the angel Gabriel declared to his mother, “*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*” (Luke 1:32-33). Almost as soon as he was born, wise men came from the East, saying, “*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*” (Matthew 2:2). The very week before his crucifixion, the multitude who accompanied our Lord at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem “*took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed [is] the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord*” (John 12:13). He was born the King. He lived as the King. He died as the King. He arose as the King. He reigns as the King. And he is coming again as the King. — Our Lord Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is not your Savior if he does not reign in your heart as your Lord and King (Luke 14:26-33).

Divine Sovereignty

Third, in the crucifixion of our Lord we see numerous displays of God’s absolute sovereignty. Every description of our Savior’s death upon the cursed tree given in Holy Scripture is replete with these displays of God’s total, absolute sovereignty in the whole affair. The four Gospel narratives (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are filled with them. In this scene of slaughter at Golgotha the Holy Spirit shows us a tremendous display of God’s glorious sovereignty in three things.

1. The two thieves who were crucified with our Lord give us a display of God's sovereign, distinguishing grace in salvation. — *"Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst"* (v. 18).

You do not need me to remind you that one of these thieves was plucked as a firebrand from the burning out of the very jaws of hell by God's sovereign grace, while the other was left to suffer the just consequences of his sin. Let it never be forgotten by us that if we are saved, we are saved because God did it. The only distinction between you and me and the damned in hell is the distinction that grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 15:10; Romans 9:16).

2. The fulfillment of Scripture by men who had no regard for the Scriptures is another great display of God's sovereignty (vv. 23-24).

"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also [his] coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. {woven: or, wrought} They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did."

These soldiers had no more regard for the Scriptures than hogs have for diamonds. Yet they did exactly what God ordained that they would do and said that they would do (Acts 4:27-28; 13:27-29). Thus the Lord God makes even his Son's murderers to be his witnesses!

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put [it] upon hyssop, and put [it] to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (vv. 28-30).

This mixture of vinegar (flat wine that had gone sour and bitter) mixed with gall was thought to be a mixture that would prolong one's life. It was given by the soldiers because they must, according to God's decree, fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 69:21. — *"They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."*

John Gill tells us — "This potion of vinegar with gall, was an aggravating circumstance in our Lord's sufferings, being given to him when he had a violent thirst upon Him; and was an emblem of the bitter cup of God's wrath, he had already tasted of in the garden and was about to drink up"

Matthew tells us that *"when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink."* Our Lord refused to drink of this mixture because he was determined to suffer the wrath of God for us without any distraction or intoxication of mind. And he refused to drink of it because he would make all to know that he would do nothing to prolong his life, but was willing to die now that his hour, the fullness of time, had come.

Again, we are reminded that the Lord God Almighty was in total control of the affairs on this day of infamy by the fact that these barbaric soldiers did nothing except what God had long before said they would do. The parting of our Lord's garments was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. — *"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."*

There is another great display of God's sovereignty in the fact that he caused unbelieving, reprobate men to declare his truth, to declare the very essence of the Gospel, though they never knew it themselves.

We cannot know for certain, but it may be that it was the testimony of spineless Pilate, the testimony of the wicked, taunting, jeering Jews, and the testimony of the mocking chief priests, scribes, and elders that became the instruments by which God taught that elect thief the Gospel and brought him to faith in Christ. Have you ever thought about the testimony that he heard that day? Pilate declared, “*THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*” The priests, scribes, elders, and people, danced in a drunken, hellish party around Immanuel’s cross, and in their blasphemy spoke the truth of God as distinctly as inspired prophets and apostles.

- “*Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days.*” — Though they knew it not, those religious ritualists proclaimed the fact of our Lord’s death and resurrection. — He destroyed the temple of his body in death; and he raised it up again in three days.
- “*He saved others; himself he cannot save.*” — That is the very essence of the Gospel! The Son of God died as our Substitute. Because he saved us, he had to sacrifice himself!
- “*He trusted in God.*” — Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a man, lived by faith, in all things trusting God his Father. Thus he taught us how to honor, obey, and live for God in this world by faith.
- “*He said, I am the Son of God.*” — Our modern infidels choose to ignore it, but those people heard his doctrine plainly. Jesus Christ of Nazareth openly, publicly declared himself to be the Son of God. And that is who he is! He is God and man in one glorious Person. — God-Man: the God-Man in Mary’s womb, the God-Man in obedience for us, the God-Man dying upon the tree, the God-Man exalted to save!

Real

Fourth, I remind you again that the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon Golgotha’s brow were real. Our Lord Jesus endured all the hell of God’s wrath for us when he bore our sins in his own body on the cross. He suffered all the wrath of God that we deserved in his body, in his soul, and in his spirit. The listing of his agonies is torturous to read. — What must it have been to experience them! The most savage barbarians in history have not been able to equal the tortures heaped upon the Son of God by the Jews and the Romans who crucified him.

J. C. Ryle rightly observed, “Never let it be forgotten that he had a real human body, a body exactly like our own, just as sensitive, just as vulnerable, just as capable of feeling intense pain.”

Crucifixion was the most indescribably horrid form of execution ever forced upon a human being. The person crucified was stretched out on his back on a piece of timber. His hands were stretched out on the cross piece, and nailed through the wrists to the wood with huge spikes. His feet were crossed one on top of the other and nailed together with a huge mallet driving the spike through them both and fastening them to the wood. Then the Lord Jesus was picked up on the cross and it was dropped into a socket three or four feet deep, with his body attached to it! There he hung, not dying suddenly (No vital organ was touched!), in excruciating pain for six long hours. There he hung, naked, shamed, covered from head to foot with the excrement of others men’s foul throats and his own holy blood. His head, his hands, his feet oozing with blood, throbbing in pain, the Lord of glory hung there for six indescribable hours of hell.

Yet, his agony of soul was infinitely more excruciating to him than that of his body. The holy Lamb of God was made sin for us! The Son of God was forsaken by his Father. The Lord of Glory was slain by the sword of his own holy justice.

Redemption Finished

Fifth, Our dear Savior, by his sin-atonement sacrifice and death at Calvary, finished the work of redemption. — “*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*” (v. 30). All the Old Testament types and prophecies were fulfilled. Justice was satisfied. Righteousness

was brought in. Sin was put away. The way to God was opened for sinners. Salvation was obtained! — *“With his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us!”* Behold, the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness — our crucified Lord! — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus!”*

Chapter 123

Seven Words from the Cross

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 19:25-30)

How I pray that the Lord God will be pleased to grant me grace that I may live with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ever before my mind, with the scenes of my Savior’s redemptive work and glory constantly upon my heart, and the redemption he accomplished for me by his substitutionary death ever flooding my ransomed soul. Let’s go again to Mt. Calvary, asking God the Holy Spirit to inscribe the things we see and hear here upon our hearts, for the glory of his own great name, for Christ’s sake. — What a scene of infamy we have before us! — What a scene of grace! — What a scene of the revelation of the glory of God!

Our Lord’s Humiliation

The Lord Jesus was hurriedly brought before Pilate, where the Jews slanderously accused him. But Pilate saw their accusations for what they were, nothing but the rantings of envious religionists. Once he found out the Lord Jesus was a Galilean, he tried to rid himself of the matter and sent him to Herod.

When Herod could not persuade the Son of God to dance before him, he mocked him shamefully and sent him back to Pilate. And that day, those two political jackals became friends. And Pilate, willing to please the Jews, “*delivered Jesus to their will*” to be crucified. Pilate, Herod, the high priest, the Jewish mob, and the soldiers were but contemptible little imps, unworthy of further mention. There is but one thing worthy of notice in all that is recorded in the Book of God about our Savior’s arrest, mock trial, and crucifixion, one thing they were written down by inspiration of God to reveal, and that is the greatness of our Lord’s humiliation for us.

What base contempt and mockery our God and Savior endured in the house of the high priest, and at the palaces of Pilate and Herod! Truly, “*He humbled himself!*” He emptied himself of all the dignity and honor that rightly belongs to him, that he might redeem and save sinners who deserve to be forever mocked in the fires of hell and held in contempt by him. — “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Depravity and Substitution

God the Holy Ghost has given us a terrible, graphic display of the utter depravity of our race and the vile hatred of the human heart for the God of Glory! What base, self-serving weaklings men in powerful positions often are! — Pilate cared for nothing but himself. Though a man of almost absolute power in his realm, he cowered before the people he ruled, just to gain a moment of approval from them. The whole crowd, religious and reprobate, Jewish and pagan, craved to murder the incarnate God. And Pilate “*delivered Jesus to their will.*” — What an indictment this is against the will of man!

Yet, there is something glorious here. By the arrangement of Divine providence, there was a custom and a man in the scene before us who gave opportunity for our Lord to display everything he had come to accomplish. When Barabbas was released and the Lord Jesus died in his place, it is as though the Savior had said, “See this! This is why I came to this hour, to die the Just for the unjust in the place of guilty sinners as their Substitute that they might go free!”

Three Malefactors

It is not by accident that John tells us that they crucified our Lord, “*and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst*” (v. 18). The obvious indication is that our blessed Redeemer “*was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many*” (Isaiah 53:12). — “*And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors*” (Mark 15:28). Being our Surety and Representative, he stood before the offended law and justice of God as the greatest of all sinners!

“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 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. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Seven Statements

Let’s take another look at those seven things our Lord Jesus Christ spoke from the cross, as he hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin, suffering all the horror of the wrath of God for us, when he was made sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. I am certain that our Redeemer said many things that are not recorded in the four gospels (Psalms 22, 40, 69). But the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to record seven specific statements spoken by the Lamb of God, as he hung upon the cursed tree as our sin-atonement Sacrifice, bearing all the fury of Divine justice and wrath as our Substitute.

These last seven words that fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ are recorded in the Book of God by Divine purpose and inspiration for our learning, edification, comfort, and hope. This is what God himself declares in Romans 15:4. — “*Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*”

In this Volume of Inspiration God the Holy Ghost has taken very special care to record these seven things spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, as he was laying down his life for us, to put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. As he hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin, suffering all the horrible fury of the wrath of God for us, when he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, the Lord Jesus made seven distinct statements which should ever be held in fond memory in our hearts.

There have been mountains of words and thousands of sermons preached from these seven sayings of Christ from the cross. I cannot add anything to what has already been spoken and written by faithful men. But I do hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to give you a glimpse of what I see in them. These are the very words spoken by our great God and Savior in His humiliation, spoken as he engaged the forces of hell and endured the indescribable wrath of God in the place of sinners. In these seven words from the cross I see the glorious Person, work, and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ beautifully demonstrated.

A Word of Forgiveness

The first of those seven statements is found in Luke 23:34. — “*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*” Here I see Christ our Mediator, our High Priest and Advocate pleading for the forgiveness of guilty sinners. Here is the Son of God suffering by the hands of wicked men, suffering with wicked men, suffering as a wicked man, and yet praying for the men who

made Him suffer. — *“There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men,”* and that Mediator is *“the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5).

We must have a Mediator (Hebrews 5:1). The Mediator must be a man of God’s choosing (Hebrews 5:4-5). The Mediator must pray and be heard (Hebrews 5:7). He must have a sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifice was Himself, His own life, His blood, His body and His soul! The sacrifice must be offered upon the altar of God. The Altar upon which our Savior sacrificed Himself was the Altar of His own Divinity. And the Mediator must have a blessing to bestow. That blessing is God’s salvation (Numbers 6:24-26). None but the Lord Jesus Christ meets the qualifications of a mediator between God and men (John 14:6; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2).

A Word of Assurance

The *second* word is found in Luke 23:43. The dying thief cried, *“Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!”* — *“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* Here is a word of salvation and assurance spoken to a believing sinner by Christ our Savior and King.

Even as he hung upon the cross, suffering untold agony under the wrath of God, Jesus Christ reigned as Lord and King over everything. Do not ever imagine that our Lord Jesus was in anyway the helpless victim of circumstances when He died at Calvary. Even in his death, he was the God of all circumstances and all events. Here is the sovereign King, the Ruler of the Kingdom of God, saving whom He will (Rom. 9:15). Here is the King of Grace opening the door which no mere man can ever open. Here is the Prince of Peace giving peace that no man can give. Here is the King of Glory promising mercy and eternal life that no man can merit. *“Salvation is of the LORD!”* Grace comes from the throne of grace; and the King who sits upon that throne is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:22; John 5:20-21; 17:2).

A Word of Tender Care

The *third* word spoken by our Lord as He hung upon the cross is found in John 19:26-27. Here I hear Christ, our Representative and Example, speaking a word of tender care.

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

Even in the agonies of death, under the penalty of sin, enduring the wrath of God, fulfilling the everlasting covenant, accomplishing eternal redemption for us, and satisfying the Divine justice, our Lord Jesus Christ did not neglect the responsibilities of manhood. Our Savior, as our Representative and Example, deliberately gave attention to His responsibilities as a man, even in the time of His dying agony.

Our blessed Savior fulfilled all righteousness for us, both as our Representative and as our Example. He did everything that it is right for a man to do. He was circumcised. He was subject unto his parents. He was baptized. He attended the synagogue. Our Lord Jesus was *“made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”* And in his dying hour, our Redeemer tenderly cared for his mother.

He fulfilled all righteousness as our legal Representative (Romans 5:19); and He fulfilled all righteousness as our Example of Righteousness (John 13:13-15; 1 Peter 2:21-24). If we would learn how to live in this world for the glory of God, if we would learn how to serve our generation, if we would learn how to worship God, we must go to Calvary. There we behold the Lamb of God and learn how to be a man. There we learn what submission to the will of God involves. At Calvary, we see patience in suffering, learn how to love our brethren, how to love our wives (Ephesians 5:25-27), and how to give (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Yet, there is more here than our Lord's care for His mother. When our Savior said to Mary, "*Woman, behold thy Son,*" I cannot help thinking that he was saying, "Behold me now, and remember what I told you when I was just a boy, '*I must be about My Father's business.*' Behold Me now, and remember the song you sang when I was still in your womb" (Luke 1:46-55).

A Word of Agony

The *fourth* word is found in Matthew 27:46. — "*And about the ninth hour (at 3:00 in the afternoon, after three hours of great darkness) Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"

Here I see Christ our Substitute crying out in agony of soul. This is the only time recorded in Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Father as God. Here He takes the lowest place of humanity and cries out to his Father, and our Father, as a creature to be pitied by his Creator. In His great agony, this mighty Man who is God reverts to his childhood, speaking in His native Syrian tongue, not in the Hebrew of His fathers or in the Greek he acquired as he matured.

At the height of His obedience to the Father, the Lord of Glory was forsaken by His Father, because we deserved to be forever forsaken of that God whom we have spent our lives forsaking. He was forsaken of God, because He was made sin for us. Reproach now broke His heart.

"*My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?*" This is a cry arising from depths of infinite anguish no human being can know. This cry no mortal mind can comprehend. This mystery no creature can fathom. Martin Luther, after studying and meditating upon this text for hours, closed his Bible, slammed his fists down on his desk and cried, "God forsaken of God! My God, no man can understand that!"

I will not attempt to explain what no man can understand. But, with a happy broken heart, I rejoice in the fact of this our Substitute's greatest sorrow. He was forsaken of God. That means those sinners for whom He died shall never be forsaken of God (Isaiah 53:9-11; John 3:14-16; Romans 5:6-8; 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:9-10).

What an infinitely, horribly evil thing sin must be! How holy, just, righteous, and good our God must be! O my soul, how great, how infinitely great is the love of God for his people! How anxious, willing, and ready the holy Lord God is to save poor sinners! — "*He delighteth in mercy!*"

A Word of Great Need

Our Lord's fifth word from the cross is found in John 19:28. — "*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*" Here is Christ the Man expressing His great need and desire. Here we see our Savior's real humanity. This is the shortest of the seven statements He made on the cross; but it is every bit as instructive as the other six. I am sure it is meant to show us at least these three things about our Savior.

1. *His Body's Thirst* — Being in anguish of body, burning with fever, His tongue swollen and cleaving to his jaws, He thirsted for water, just like the rich man in hell, as He endured the fire of God's hot, holy wrath for us.
2. *His Soul's Thirst* — Being forsaken of God, He thirsted in his soul. — "*As the hart planteth after the water brooks,*" so panted His soul for God (Psalms 22:1-21; 40:11-13; 69:1-20).

3. *His Heart's Thirst* — The Lord of Glory was made sin, made to endure all the horror of God's holy, unmitigated wrath, because He thirsted for the souls of men. He thirsted for His people. He thirsted to be thirsted after. When I hear the Master cry, "*I thirst,*" I can almost hear His heart crying, "*I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.*"

A Word of Accomplishment

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put [it] upon hyssop, and put [it] to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." (John 19:28-30)

"*It is finished!*" — What a blessed, triumphant word! Our blessed Savior was not crying a sigh of relief. He was not saying, "At last, it is over." Most men leave this world with things unfinished. So many plans unfinished! So many hopes unfulfilled! So many desires unsatisfied! So many works incomplete! So many things they wanted to do, or see, or experience, unfinished! Not so with the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Surety! He accomplished everything he came here to do.

What did he come here to do? — Did he come here to do the Father's will (Hebrews 10)? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to save his people (Matthew 1:21)? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to fulfill all the types, promises, and prophecies of the Scriptures? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to make an end of sin? Did he come here to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to bring in everlasting righteousness? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to obtain eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12)? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to redeem us from the curse of the law? "*It is finished!*" — Did he come here to fulfill and make an end of the law? Did he come here to magnify the law and make it honorable? "*It is finished!*"

This is the Surety's cry of accomplished suretyship to the Father. — "*It is finished!*" — "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do!*" Here our Covenant Surety says to his Father, I have finished all the work trusted to my hands. I have redeemed all the souls trusted to me. I have ransomed all the sheep. I have found all the lost ones I came to find. All the work is fully done, well done, perfectly done!

This is the cry of our great Surety to poor, needy sinners! — "*It is finished!*" — Wrath is finished! — Judgment is finished! — Sin is finished! — Righteousness is finished! — Redemption is finished! — Justification is finished! — Sanctification is finished! — Salvation is finished!

"It is finished!" Sinners, hear it:
Hear the dying Savior's cry;
"It is finished!" Angels sing it,
Sing the praise of Christ on high.
"It is finished!" — *"It is finished!"*
Tell it through the earth and sky!

Justice now demands salvation
For those souls whose wrath Christ bore;
And it smiles with approbation
On the ransomed evermore!
Grace and mercy, grace and mercy
Freely flow from boundless stores.

Hear the Son of God declare it,
All is done He came to do!
Needy sinners, Hear, believe it. —
Is not this good news to you? —
“*It is finished!*” “*It is finished!*”
All is done! Oh, yes, it’s true!

“*It is finished!*” All is over.
Jesus drank damnation dry!
Never can a ransomed sinner
God’s salvation be denied!
“*It is finished!*” “*It is finished!*”
Cries our Sur’ty now on High!

Who is he that shall condemn us?
Who shall charge us now with sin?
It is God who justified us,
Christ Who died, cries in our name, —
“*It is finished!*” “*It is finished!*”
Praised forever be His name!

A Word of Rest

The Savior’s last word from the cross is found in Luke 23:46 — “*And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*” Our Savior died with the Word of God in his heart and on his lips (Psalm 31:1-5). Here I see Christ our Sabbath entering into rest. Once our great Redeemer had finished his work, He “*cried with a loud voice, and said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*” Thus he entered into his rest and obtained eternal rest for us (Hebrews 4:9-11).

Notice here, our Savior who had cried, “*My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*” now calls his Father by that endearing name, “Father.” The storm of God’s holy wrath beat fiercely upon His holy soul; but now the storm is nearly over. Only one thing is to be done. He must yet die; but here He seems to say to poor, needy sinners, “Look here. Look unto me. Behold, now reconciliation is made. Anger is turned away. Judgment is gone!” (Read Isaiah 12:1-6.)

Our blessed Savior committed his spirit into his Father’s hands, not Satan’s. Some vainly imagine that the Lord Jesus was now taken to hell to be tormented of the devil for three days. That is not so (Hebrews 9:12). He owed Satan nothing. Here he conquered the fiend of hell forever. He committed his spirit into his Father’s hands, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:22-24).

At last, in sovereign majesty, “*He gave up the ghost.*” He dismissed his spirit. This Man who is God our Savior did what none but God, who gives life and takes life at his will, could do. “*He gave up the ghost.*” That is to say, He dismissed his spirit that we might come now to Him and enter into His rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

Chapter 124
Christ Crucified
The Scriptures Fulfilled

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

“The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave *him* leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound *weight*. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation *day*; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.” (John 19:28-42)

This portion of John’s Gospel contains points of deep interest which are silently passed over by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We are not told why Matthew, Mark, and Luke omit the things John was inspired to record in this portion of Holy Scripture; and we should not curiously seek to know the reason. It is enough for us to remember that, both in what they recorded and in what they did not record, all four Evangelists wrote by inspiration of God the Holy Ghost.

Our Lord Jesus Christ lived, and died, and was buried in the sure hope and blessed prospect of his resurrection glory, that sinners trusting him might live, and die, and go to their graves in the sure hope and blessed prospect of his resurrection glory. In this passage of Holy Scripture God the Holy Ghost sets before us seven facts regarding our dear Savior’s final hours on this earth. May He be pleased to inscribe them upon our hearts.

Scripture Fulfilled

First, “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*” Throughout the biblical accounts of our Lord’s crucifixion we read that the things done to him by the hands of wicked men were done “*that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*” In this 19th chapter of John alone we see this fact set before us by Divine Inspiration three times (John 19:24; Psalm 22:18; John 19:28; Psalm 69:21; John 19:36; Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10).

John here refers to clear and specific prophecies given in Exodus, Numbers, the Psalms, and Zechariah, which received their accomplishment at the cross. I could easily point you to many others. All of these fulfilled prophecies combined tell us one thing. They tell us that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ at Golgotha was a thing planned, predestined, and prophesied by God. Hundreds of years before it came to pass every part of the

solemn transaction was arranged in the Divine counsels; and the most minute particulars were revealed to the Prophets. From first to last, it was a thing accomplished according to the purpose of God; and every portion of it was in fulfilment of precise Divine prophecy. In the highest, fullest sense, when Christ died, He “*died for our sins according to the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

I stress this point because I want you to be fully confident that the Bible is indeed the inspired, inerrant Book of God, the very Word of God. The Prophets did not merely foretell Christ’s death. They specifically foretold the particulars of his death in detail.

It is impossible to explain so many accomplishments of specific details by any means, except “*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,*” and the fact that “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” To say that these things are matters of luck, chance, or coincidence is as preposterous and absurd as it is blasphemous.

The only rational account of these prophecies and their fulfilment is the Divine inspiration of the Bible. The Prophets, who told God’s elect the details of the crucifixion of their Redeemer and ours, hundreds of years before it was accomplished, were inspired by the only Lord God who declares the end from the beginning and always performs all his will.

The Book of God must never be read as a human composition. It is the Word of the living God. The infidel who denies this runs in the face of all reason and credibility. Those who regard the repeated fulfillments of minute prophecies about Christ’s death, such as the prophecies about his dress, his thirst, his pierced side, and his bones being unbroken, as the result of chance and not of design, do so in blind rebellion, rebellion that renders them incapable of rational thought regarding the things of God.

Finished Work

Second, we must rest our souls upon the finished work of Christ (vv. 28-30).

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put [it] upon hyssop, and put [it] to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 19:28-30)

Our Lord's work was accomplished. He had honored the law in his life of perfect obedience and holiness as our Representative. Now, by his suffering and death under the wrath of God against the sin of his people, he had fully satisfied Divine justice as our Substitute (Isaiah 53:4-6). That the Scripture might be fulfilled (Psalm 22:15; Psalm 69:21), he cried, “*I thirst.*” He suffered the burning thirst of hell (Luke 16:24) that we might drink the water of life and never thirst (John 4:14). Then, once the Lord Jesus had received the vinegar, he cried, “*It is finished,*” bowed his head, and died. — What was finished?

- The Whole Will of God in Regard to Redemption (Hebrews 10:7).
- The Whole Work His Father had Given Him to Do (1 Timothy 1:15).
- The Whole Law of God and All the Types and Ceremonies It Contained (Hebrews 10:9-14).
- The Righteousness of God Performed, Perfected, and Imputed to Believers (Romans 3:19-24; Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The proof that our blessed Surety accomplished all he came to accomplish was his resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:31; Romans 4:25). Salvation and eternal life is the gift of God, not of works on our part, but through the Person and work of our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

“’Tis done, the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's and He is mine.”

Nothing can be added to his finished work. We rest our souls on a finished work, if we rest them on the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need not fear that either sin, or Satan, or law shall condemn us at the last day. We have a Savior who has done all, paid all, accomplished all, and performed all that is required for our everlasting salvation. We may take up the challenge of the Apostle, “*Who [is] he that condemneth? [It is] Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*” (Romans 8:34). Trusting Christ, we lack nothing (Colossians 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Real Death

Third, our Lord Jesus Christ really did die under the wrath of God as our Substitute. It was late in the afternoon, and the Jews’ sabbath day began immediately after sunset. So they urged Pilate to break the legs of the crucified, and hasten their death that their bodies might be taken down and buried before their sabbath began. Dead bodies hanging on crosses would defile their sabbath and their religious ceremonies (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). What hypocrisy! These self-righteous Pharisees were not concerned about crucifying the Son of God; but they were very conscientious about not defiling their holy day!

So the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves. But when they came to the Lord Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they broke not his legs. This was not out of compassion for him (as we see in the next verses), but that which restrained them was God’s sovereign providence and purpose.

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw [it] bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” (John 19:34-37)

Our dear Savior really did die in our place, as our penal Substitute, under the wrath of God. The heart of our blessed Redeemer was pierced. This was not a death stroke. Our Redeemer had already dismissed his spirit. But the piercing of his heart was done to both fulfil the Scriptures (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7) and to demonstrate that his life was gone. Our Lord did not merely faint, or swoon away, or become insensible, as some have dared to insinuate. His heart actually ceased to beat; and he actually died.

This is a matter of great importance. — Without a real death, there could be no real sacrifice. Without a real death, there could be no real resurrection. Without a real death and a real resurrection, there is no hope, and we are yet in our sins. The whole Gospel of Christ, the whole of true Christianity stands or falls with the reality of our Lord’s death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). Though that reckless, hardened Roman soldier never dreamed it, he was the unwitting servant of our God and a mighty helper to our holy faith, when he thrust his spear into our Savior’s side.

Fountain Opened

Fourth, the crucified Lamb of God is a Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. When the soldier pierced his side and there came out blood and water, John tells us that he saw this and his record is true (1 John 5:6-8). Christ is the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1).

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:1)

“This is he that came by water and blood, [even] Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” (1 John 5:6-8)

The blood and water from the Lord’s side signify both our complete justification and perfect sanctification in him, by him, and with him (1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 10:10-14).

“Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power”

Truly God

Fifth, the man Jesus Christ is himself God. If you will compare John’s statement in verse 37 with the prophecy from which it is taken in Zechariah 12:10, you cannot fail to see that God the Holy Spirit is here again giving us one of those subtle, but sweet, declarations of our Savior’s Divinity.

“And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” (John 19:37)

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for [his] only [son], and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for [his] firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

The Lord God, speaking by Zechariah, said “*They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.*” He who predicted and promised these things was and is the eternal God, the Lord Jehovah. John, writing as an inspired historian, points to Christ and tells us (quoting Zechariah), “*They shall look on him whom they have pierced.*” — Jesus is Jehovah. The man Christ Jesus is Himself God.

Unknown Disciples

Sixth, our Savior has many disciples unknown to you and me. Many boldly and confidently assert that they know who the Lord’s disciples are. They are not hesitant to denounce those who do not agree with them on all matters as reprobate unbelievers. They do not hesitate to denounce as Pharisees and hypocrites all who do not meet their measure. They tell us that a true believer will not be found here, that a child of God would never do that, that anyone who knows God will not follow that path.

I’ve had people ask me (and they were serious in asking), “Do you think Solomon was saved?” And I’ve known many who denounce Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus as hypocrites and unbelievers because they were among the Pharisees and feared the Jews. But God the Holy Spirit tells us plainly that these two men were “*disciples,*” followers of Christ. Though they were secret disciples, they were still true disciples; and they proved it. When Peter denied him and all forsook him, Joseph and Nicodemus identified themselves with the crucified Son of God.

All are Christ's who trust Christ; but none of us know who the Lord's disciples are, or where they are. Let us therefore be guarded and gracious in our judgment concerning others. Aaron led Israel in the worship of golden calves. Solomon worshipped idols with his wives. Peter sided with the Judaizers at Antioch. Paul took a legal oath at Jerusalem. John fell down to worship an angel. And Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus remained among the Pharisees for a long time, though they were true followers of Christ.

Burial not Cremation

Seventh, we bury our dead in hope of the resurrection. Our Savior's body was buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathaea, in the anticipation of his resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11). It was necessary that Christ die as our Substitute to do away with sin and death by the sacrifice of himself. It was as necessary that he be "*buried*," that his humiliation be complete. A thousand years earlier, our Lord spoke by the Spirit of prophecy and said, "*Thou hast brought me into the dust of death*" (Psalm 22:15). And it was necessary, that though he died as one under the sentence of justice, he should have an honorable funeral.

Therefore, in order to fulfil the seemingly contradictory prophecies, in which it was said, "*he is taken from prison and from judgment, and cut off out of the land of the living*," yet, contrary to all human probabilities, he must "*make his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death*" (Isaiah 53:8-9), these godly men, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus were raised up by God at the time needed to perform the task of burying our Savior's holy body.

Our dear Savior conquered death by his own death. He went into the grave to subdue the power of the grave. And he arose from the dead, in proof that he has triumphed over both death and the grave. In doing so, our Savior showed the way we shall at last conquer death and the grave by virtue of our union with him.

As our Lord was buried in prospect of the resurrection, we bury our dead, the bodies of our believing brothers and sisters in Christ, in the sure and certain hope of resurrection glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). I am often asked, "Should I be cremated or buried?" While the Scriptures do not give any commandment, they do, in my opinion, clearly indicate that the burial of our bodies is most consistent with the faith of the Gospel. Our Lord was buried in the earth; and we confess our Savior and our faith in him by a burial in believer's baptism. Clearly, there is a connection between burial in hope of the resurrection and our faith in Christ.

Let us often meditate upon the things revealed in this Book about our dear Savior's sufferings and death as our sin-atoning Substitute. Follow him from Gethsemane to Gabbatha and from Gabbatha to Golgotha. Hear his voice, as he cries, "*Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger!*"

Read the inscription on the cross. — "*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed!*" Matchless love! The Son of God became a man that sinful men might become the sons of God! The Lord Jesus, the Holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God, he who knew no sin, was made sin, that his people might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Neglect not to follow the Savior, in frequent and blessed meditation, to the tomb. — "*Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*" Glorious triumph is this. The tomb is empty! Our crucified, risen, ascended Lord holds the keys of death, hell, and the grave. Oh, for grace frequently to visit the garden and the tomb where the body of my Savior was buried. Here, I would meditate on death with sweet, happy prospect, hope, and anticipation, until he who has the key of David opens my little spot in the earth to receive my body. Even now I hear the voice of comfort and consolation. — "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!*"

Make sure, that you are “*washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Revelation 7:14). Faith in Christ is the one thing needful. — “*He that hath the Son has life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life*” (1 John 5:12). — “*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*” God help you now to believe, for Christ’s sake.

Chapter 125
“It is finished!”

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 19:30)

The Son of God has taken upon himself human flesh. He has taken our humanity into union with his Divinity. He has lived a life of perfect righteousness as the Representative of his covenant people. He has been all his life long despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His enemies have been many. His friends have been few, and those few faithless.

At last he is delivered over into the hands of them that hate him. He is crudely arrested in the garden, and arraigned before the courts of law. They robe him in mockery, strip him in shame, and hold him up as a spectacle of ridicule and scorn.

He is declared to be perfectly innocent. Yet, the cowardly judge delivers him into the hands of his persecutors. It is written, “*Pilate delivered Jesus to their will!*” He is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem. Those who had killed the prophets would now bring upon themselves the blood of the prophets’ Master.

The God-man is brought to the hill called Calvary and brutally nailed to the cross. The sun burns upon him. His wounds infect his body with scorching fever. God, his Father, whose will he came to perform, whose purpose he now fulfils, whose people he came to redeem, whose glory he came to uphold, his God and Father forsakes him! Suffering all the concentrated anguish of hell, he cries out, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*”

While he hangs there upon the tree, in mortal conflict with sin and Satan, his heart is broken, his limbs are dislocated, and his Father forsakes him. The heavens forsake him. The earth forsakes him. His disciples all forsake him and flee from him. He looks everywhere, but there is none to help. His eye looks all around, but there are none to share his toil. He treads the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God alone; and of the people there are none with him.

Yet, on and on he goes; steadily determined to drink the last bitter dregs of that cup which could not pass from his lips if his Father’s will is to be done. He says...

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” (Isaiah 50:5-7)

For the glory of God, for the honor of his holy law, for the redemption of his people, and in order to complete the work for which he came into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ perseveres in his agony, until at last he cries, “*It is finished!*” Then he gives up the ghost.

Do you hear this mighty shout of triumph? It is the word of the conquering King. It rings out today with all the freshness and force with which it rang out from Calvary more than two thousand years ago! — “*It is finished!*” Hear it from the sacred Word. Hear it from the Savior’s lips. May God the Holy Ghost give you grace to hear these three words of the sinner’s Savior ringing in your very soul. — “*It is finished!*” Oh, may all who read these lines enter into the experience of this blessed conquest.

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

I can almost see our Savior as he looks up to God his Father, as he looks around to the wondering angels of light, as he looks down upon Satan and the demons of hell, and as he looks out over the perishing multitudes of men. When he declares, "*It is finished,*" he is testifying to heaven and earth and hell that redemption's work is done! I want to show you four things about the finished work of Christ in this study.

The Fact of It

In the first place, as you hear these words fall from the Savior's lips, "*It is finished!*" — I want you to realize the fact of it. When the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cursed tree, the work of redemption was then and there complete. Nothing was left undone. Nothing more needed to be done. Nothing more could be done. Christ had come into the world to redeem a people unto himself; and those people are redeemed.

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." (Daniel 9:24)

That which Daniel prophesied, the Son of God declares finished by his sacrificial death as our Substitute at Calvary. What did our Savior mean when he said, "*It is finished?*"

He meant that all the types, promises, and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled and finished forever. The Old Testament Scriptures tailor a garment that will fit only one Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Psalm 40:6-8; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Micah 5:2; Malachi 4:2). There is not a single promise, or type, or prophecy of the Old Testament that does not find its perfect and complete fulfillment in Christ. Not only does the garment fit him perfectly, it fits him alone. Only the Lord Jesus Christ fits the character of that One who was promised in the Old Testament. He is a Prophet like Moses and a Deliverer like Joshua. He is a Priest like Aaron and like Melchisedec. He is a King like David and like Solomon. He is the Lamb that was slain and the Scapegoat that was not slain. He is the Turtledove that was dipped in blood and the Priest who killed the bird. He is the Altar and the Tabernacle. He is the Mercy-Seat and the Showbread. He is the Sacrifice and the Sacrificer. Everything in the Old Testament points to Christ.

When our Lord said, "*It is finished,*" he meant that all the typical sacrifices of the ceremonial law were completely fulfilled and, therefore, forever abolished (Hebrews 10:1-14). Judaism today is just as idolatrous as Romanism. God has put aside forever the carnal ordinances of the Old Testament. — "*God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24).

When the Lord Jesus cried, "*It is finished,*" he meant that all the commandments of the moral law of God were now perfectly fulfilled and that the rule of the law was, therefore, ended and abolished forever. — "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*" (Romans 10:4). The age of sonship has come; and the sons of God are no longer subject to the tutelage and discipline of the law. All who are taught of God are made willing servants in the day of his power. Those who give from a willing heart generously do not need a law to compel them to pay a legal tax. Those who rest in Christ do not need to be ordered to keep a sabbath day. Our lives are a perpetual Sabbath. Those who love Christ do not need the ball and chain of the law to make them do what is right for the glory of Christ.

When he cried, "*It is finished,*" our blessed Lord proclaimed that the way of access has been opened up to God. The veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to the bottom, telling us that a way was opened for sinful man to approach the holy God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

When the Lord Jesus Christ cried, "*It is finished,*" he declared that he had perfectly accomplished the redemption of his people (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:12). The work his Father gave him to do was done. All that he had agreed upon in the covenant of grace as our Surety, he had now fulfilled (John 17:4). He had now

brought in an everlasting righteousness. He had now satisfied Divine justice. The debt was paid. The debtors were discharged. By his one offering for sin upon the cursed tree, the atonement was accomplished, propitiation was made, reconciliation between God and his covenant people was complete; and he perfected forever them that are sanctified. The cup of wrath was drained. The whip of justice was worn out on his back. The curse of the law fell on him. The thunder of Sinai was silenced. He swallowed up the sword of God's infinite wrath and justice in His holy soul. He had now annihilated the sins of his people. He had now conquered Satan. He had now defeated death.

"It is finished!" Oh, child of God, I want you to recognize this blessed fact. In the substitutionary death of Christ at Calvary...

- The Old Testament Scriptures are fulfilled.
- The typical sacrifices of the ceremonial law are forever abolished.
- The commandments of the moral law are all perfectly and representatively performed for us and fulfilled for us.
- The way of access to God is open.
- The redemption of our souls is accomplished.

The Result of It

In the second place, as you hear these words, sounded out by our mighty Savior, *"It is finished,"* I want you to rejoice in the result of it. Did you hear the Son of God say, *"It is finished?"* Believe it, my friend. It is true. The Lord Jesus Christ, by his representative life and vicarious atonement in our place, has finished the work of redemption for us. And having finished the work which the Father gave him to do, there are certain inevitable consequences which must follow. The death of Christ was an effectual atonement for sin. Let me briefly show you what some of the results of our Lord's sacrifice are.

Because of our Savior's finished work, the covenant of God's grace has been ratified and put into force (Hebrews 9:15-17). The covenant was signed and sealed before all worlds. It was ordered in all things and sure by God's eternal decree. But when Christ said, *"It is finished,"* that covenant was put into force by blood. Not one stipulation of the covenant could ever be broken. Not one promise could ever fail. All the blessings of the covenant were made sure to all of God's elect by the blood of Christ. — Though he died to put his will in force, our crucified Redeemer lives in heaven to see to it that his will is executed (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Because of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, God almighty, in his perfect holiness, is both just and the Justifier of guilty sinners (Romans 3:24-26). Since the God-man died, there is hope for sinners! Through the propitiatory atonement of Christ, God can be just and still justify the ungodly. Indeed, the justice of God demands that all for whom Christ died must go free.

Because of the finished work of Christ, the Holy Spirit has come down from heaven to gather out God's elect (Galatians 3:13-14; John 16:7-14). Since the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, the Gospel is sent into all the world. The Gospel of God's free, sovereign, saving grace in Christ is a worldwide message (Joel 2:32). — *"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Because of the finished work of Christ, the salvation of God's elect is secure (John 6:39). He who entered into heaven with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for his people, will see to it that his people all have the eternal redemption he obtained for them.

Every sinner bought by blood
Shall at last be brought to God.
Truth and justice make it plain —

Jesus did not die in vain!

None for whom the Savior bled
Can be severed from their Head.
Called by grace! Kept forever!
Jesus is a mighty Savior!

Not one soul for whom Christ shed His blood at Calvary shall ever perish. All of His elect shall be saved. All of his redeemed ones are secure. Justice demands it! — *“He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.”* Our sins are gone. The law has no claim upon us. Christ cannot fail (Isaiah 45:23-25). That means every blood bought soul shall be with Christ in Glory!

Because of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory of God is revealed in the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). In the cross of Christ we see all the marvelous attributes of the eternal Godhead brilliantly displayed. — His Holiness and His Goodness — His Justice and His Mercy — His Truth and His Grace — His Immutability and His Wisdom — His Greatness and His Love

Because of his finished work as our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted to the throne of universal monarchy to rule over all flesh (Philippians 2:9-11; Psalm 2:8).

The Experience of It

The work of redemption which secured the salvation of all God’s elect was completed at Calvary by Christ alone. Its results were immediately effected. When he died in my place, and I died in him, my soul was as safe and secure under his blood as it is today. But I did not know it, until he came by the power of his Spirit and brought me into the experience of it.

So, in the third place, when you hear the Savior say, *“It is finished,”* I want you to know the experience of it. In preaching the Gospel, we proclaim to men the good news of full redemption, the glad tidings of full atonement, and the comforting message of full pardon. We know nothing of a possibility redemption, a partial redemption, or a provided redemption. We proclaim an accomplished redemption. We declare to sinners everywhere that for all who look to Christ, *“the warfare is over”* (Isaiah 40:1-2).

How can a poor, lost, spiritually dead sinner enter into the experience of Christ’s finished work? I can tell you this: — If ever you come to experience the finished work of Christ in everlasting salvation, it will be the result of his work and his work alone. The Lord must send his Word to heal your soul, or you will never be saved (Psalm 107:20; Ephesians 1:13). The Lord must send his Spirit into your heart, or you cannot live. Christ himself must be revealed to you and in you, or you cannot believe (Galatians 1:15-16; Philippians 3:3). When God reveals Christ in your heart, he gives you faith to trust him, he proclaims peace in your soul, he breaks the iron chains of your sin, and he causes your troubled soul to find rest in him (Psalm 107:1-31). Only he can do it!

The Cause of It

In the fourth place, as you hear the Lord Jesus Christ cry, *“It is finished,”* I want you to see and appreciate the cause of it. Why should the Lord Jesus Christ endure the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross for me? What caused the Son of God to stand as my Surety and agree to finish the work of my soul’s redemption? What motivated our Lord in this blessed work? The Book of God tells us. It was his Father’s will (Psalm 40:7-8). There was no other possible means of saving us (Galatians 2:21). He loved us, and he was determined to have us (Malachi 3:17). And the Lord our God was determined to glorify himself by saving us (Psalms 106:8; Ephesians 2:7).

"It is finished!" — God will never accept the works of your hands; but he has accepted the work of his Son's hand. Will you rest your soul upon the finished work of Christ alone?

"Nothing, either great or small;
Nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago!

When He, from His lofty throne,
Stooped to do and die,
Everything was fully done;
Hearken to His cry —

'It is finished!' Yes indeed,
Finished every jot.
Sinner, this is all you need.
Tell me, Is it not?

Weary, working, plodding one,
Why toil you so?
Cease your doing, all was done,
Long, long ago!

Till to Jesus' work you cling
By a simple faith,
Doing is a deadly thing.
Doing ends in death!

Cast your deadly 'doing' down,
Down at Jesus' feet.
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete!"

James Procter

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, *and* for thy truth's sake." (Psalms 115:1)

Amen.

Chapter 126
Lessons from the Resurrection

“The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, *and looked* into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and *to my God, and your God*. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things unto her.” (John 20:1-18)

I once read about an old woman, a believer, whose age began to take its toll on her, especially on her memory. At one time, she knew much of the Bible by heart. Eventually only one precious, little portion stayed with her: “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*” Soon, part of that slipped from her mind, as well. She would be found often quietly repeating what she could of the text. Family and friends would hear her going over it again and again. – “*That which I have committed unto him.*” Just before she slipped out of this world into glory, her children noticed her lips moving, and they bent over to hear what she was saying. She was repeating just one word, “*Him...Him...Him.*” She had lost her memory of the whole Bible and of everything else, but one word. Yet, she had the whole Bible and had everything in that one word — “*Him.*” This blessed Book is all about “*him.*” I want you to know, trust, love, and worship “*him.*” May God the Holy Spirit now set our hearts on “*him.*”

John 20 takes us from Christ’s death upon the cursed tree as our sin-atonement Substitute to his resurrection. He who was delivered up to the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross because of our sins which were made his own, arose from the dead because of our justification accomplished by his death, by his satisfaction of Divine justice with his own blood. But I am not interested in merely convincing people that the doctrine of the resurrection is true. I want to know, and I want you to know him who is himself “*the Resurrection and the Life.*” May God give us grace to know him and the power of his resurrection.

Like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John dwells on these two great events with peculiar fullness and specificity. And we need not wonder why. The whole Gospel of the grace of God, the whole of our saving faith, the whole salvation of our souls hangs on these facts: — “*That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). What are the lessons God the Holy Ghost intends for us to learn from this portion of Holy Scripture?

Forgiveness and Love

First, we are reminded that those who are forgiven most love most (Luke 7:36-50). The first one John names among those who came to the Savior's tomb is Mary Magdalene. The history of this faithful woman is not given in any detail in the Word of God. We only know that she was one out of whom the Lord had cast "*seven devils*" (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). Mary had been possessed of the devil and wasted her life serving him, until the Lord Jesus saved her by his grace. From that day on, Mary was always by his side, following him, hanging on his every word, and observing his wondrous works.

It was this woman, if I am not mistaken, who anointed the Lord Jesus in the house of Simon the leper. The Master was referring to her when he asked Simon, "Who will love most?" He was referring to her when he said, — "*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little*" (Luke 7:47).

Mary's gratitude to our Lord for his deliverance of her soul from the clutches of hell and for his forgiveness of her sins was a gratitude that knew no bounds. Mary Magdalene had been forgiven much; and she loved much. She felt that she owed so much to the Savior. She felt strongly that there was nothing too great to do for Christ, and nothing too much to sacrifice for him. Mary was the last at the cross. Mary was the first at the sepulcher. Mary arose early and came to the tomb while it was still dark. Having been forgiven much, Mary loved much. Having received much, she loved much; and loving much, she did much, constrained only by a heart of love for and gratitude to her Savior.

The fact is, the more fully and more deeply we are aware of our depravity and sin, the more we will cherish our Savior and the forgiveness of our sins by his blood. To whom much is forgiven, the same love much. Where sin is not deeply and painfully felt, little is done for Christ. The man who is deeply conscious of his own guilt and corruption, and deeply convinced that without the blood, the death, the grace, and intercession of Christ he would sink forever into the lowest hell, that is the man who will spend and be spent for the Savior. That is the man who thinks, "I can never do enough for my Redeemer." — Spirit of God, make me such a man! Give me Mary's sense of indebtedness, gratitude, and love for "*the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me!*" Show me more of myself! Show me more of Christ! Show me more of God's amazing grace to me in him!

When we begin to realize the greatness of our sin and the greatness of Christ's forgiveness, then, only then, can we begin to understand what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "*The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again*" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee!"

Different Personalities

Second, God the Holy Ghost here reminds us again that God's saints are not all alike in personality and temperament. When Mary Magdalene told Peter and John, "*They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him*" (v. 3), as they ran to the sepulcher and arrived at the place, all three acted differently.

They all ran to the sepulcher; but John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, outran Peter and reached the empty grave first. John stooped down and looked in, but went no further. Peter, a bit more zealous and impulsive, ran right into the sepulcher that he might see with his own eyes. Mary, apparently, came somewhat more slowly back to the tomb and quietly waited to see what Peter and John would do and say. They all loved

the Lord Jesus and trusted him. The hearts of these three believers were, no doubt, full of hopes, and fears, and anxieties, and expectations, all tangled together. Yet each behaved in their own characteristic fashion. Without question, these things were intentionally written by the Spirit of God for our learning.

We should always remember that there are great differences of personality and temperament among God's saints. All are redeemed, justified, and sanctified. All are washed in the blood of Christ. All live and walk in the Spirit. All seek the glory of God. But God's saints are not all alike. We do not do things exactly the same way. We do not all react to things the same way.

If we will remember this simple fact, it will save us much trouble in the journey of life and prevent many unkind and uncharitable thoughts and words. We should never judge one another harshly, or think ill of others, because they do not see or feel things exactly as we do, or because things do not affect them the same way they affect us. The flowers in the Lord's garden are not all of one color and of one scent, though they are all planted by one Spirit and are all in his garden. The subjects of his kingdom do not all look alike or always act alike, though they all love the same Savior and all have their names written in the same Book of Life. The Church of Christ has some in its ranks who are like Peter, and some who are like John, and some who are like Mary. Some are fathers, some are elders, some are young men, some are mothers, some are children; but all are God's. Let us always treat them as such. All who trust the Lord Jesus are loved and chosen of God the Father. All who trust him are loved and redeemed by God the Son. All who are born again are loved and called by God the Spirit.

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:1-5)

Much Ignorance

Third, we must never forget that there is much ignorance in true believers. — “*For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead*” (v. 9). That fact seems utterly incredible. Doesn't it? For three years the Lord's disciples had heard him declare repeatedly that his resurrection from the dead would be the proof of his messiahship and the means by which he would take his seat upon the throne of Heaven as the Son of David. Yet, it appears that none of them, except Mary, had paid any attention to his words in that regard. — These were true believers; but they were very ignorant of some very important Gospel truths.

If the Lord's disciples remained so ignorant of this simple, vital fact, after sitting under his ministry for three years, no faithful Gospel preacher should be surprised to find that those who hear him are ignorant of a few things. The one thing needful is not a head full of knowledge, but a heart full of Christ! — “*Christ in you, the Hope of glory!*”

Some things we must know if we would be saved. — We must know our sinfulness and guilt before God. — We must know Christ and his accomplishments as our Savior and Redeemer. — We must know that salvation is by the grace of God, through faith in Christ.

The extent to which one man may have true grace with much ignorance and another may have much knowledge and no grace is one of the greatest mysteries in world. It is a mystery that only the Day of Judgment will unravel. Let us then seek knowledge, and be ashamed of ignorance. But above all, let us make sure that Christ is ours. Let us make our calling and election sure, trusting the Son of God as our only Lord and Savior!

Baseless Fears

Fourth, let us learn from this portion of Holy Scripture that our countless fears and sorrows are, for the most part, to be attributed to our own ignorance and unbelief. We are told that Mary stood at the sepulcher weeping, and wept as if nothing could comfort her.

Only John was inspired of God to record the conversation that took place between Mary Magdalene and the Lord Jesus in verses 11-18. Yet, this is, in my opinion, the most heart touching account of our Lord's many appearances after his resurrection.

When Peter and John went to their homes, Mary stayed at the sepulcher. Love to her Lord would not let her leave the place where he had been laid. Where he was now, she did not know. What had become of him, she could not tell. But she could not drag herself away from the empty tomb, where Joseph and Nicodemus had laid her Lord. And her loving attachment to the Lord Jesus was richly honored. — Mary Magdalene saw the angels whom Peter and John never observed. Mary Magdalene heard those angels speak words of comfort to her heart. Mary Magdalene was the first to see our Lord Jesus after he rose from the dead, the first to hear his voice, the first to hold conversation with him.

Blessed are those who wait to find the Savior! Mary stood there at the place where the Lord Jesus was last seen, waiting for him. There she stands in silence, weeping with great sorrow, looking in, not knowing how to leave the sacred spot. Let us wait like Mary in the House of God to worship him, before the preaching of the Gospel to hear his Word, at the Lord's Table to remember him. Like the spouse of old, let us send out the anxious inquiry, "*Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?*" (Song of Solomon 3:3). — "*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love*" (Song of Solomon 5:8).

Yet, we are told that Mary stood there "*weeping*" (v. 11). She wept in great sorrow and fear, as if nothing could comfort her. She wept when the angels spoke to her. She wept when the Lord Jesus himself spoke to her. But her sorrows and fears were completely baseless. Had she only known what had happened, was happening, and would soon happen, she would have been dancing and rejoicing.

O my dear brother, my dear sister, how readily we must identify ourselves with Mary in this! We often weep when we should really rejoice. We cry too much, like Jacob, "*All these things are against me,*" when in reality, our God is working all things together for our good! If we could see as God sees, if we knew what he knows, in every circumstance, in every event, we would give thanks and praise to him. I can hear you say, "But, pastor, we can't see as God sees or know what he knows." I understand that; but we ought to be able to trust him.

"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy and will break
With blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His works in vain;
God is His own interpreter.
And He will make it plain.”

Christ Near

Fifth, the Spirit of God reminds us here that the Lord Jesus is very near, even when (especially when) we are altogether unaware of his presence. Mary complained, “*They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him*” (v. 13). Yet, all the while her risen Lord was right beside her, with body, and flesh, and bones. Her tears were needless. Her anxiety was unnecessary. Like Hagar in the wilderness, she had a well of water by her side; but she had no eyes to see it. Child of God, when your heart is empty, he is near to fill it. When your heart is cold, he is near to warm it. When your soul is languishing, he is near to revive it. When you are weak, he is near to strengthen you. When you are fallen, he is near to lift you up.

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

Discoveries of Christ

Sixth, every discovery we have of Christ is the result of him discovering himself to us. Though the Lord Jesus was standing in front of her, and talking with her, Mary did not and could not know him until he made himself known to her (vv. 15-16). So it is with us. We cannot know the Lord Jesus (before we are converted and after we are converted), except he make himself know to us (Isaiah 65:24; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 John 4:19-20).

Union with Christ

Seventh, let us learn and rejoice to know that all that is Christ’s is ours in him. — “*Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God*” (v. 17). There was nothing wrong with Mary touching him. He later commanded Thomas to do so. But the Lord was saying to Mary, “There is no need for you to be clinging to my body. I have something for you to do. Go tell my disciples that I have risen from the dead” — “*Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her*” (v. 18). It is not the physical presence of Christ that we need, but his grace and spiritual presence. The Lord Jesus has left us here to tell others that he has accomplished redemption by the sacrifice of himself, risen from the dead, and sits on the Throne of Grace to give repentance and remission of sins to needy sinners.

“*Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*” Be sure you get this. Roll it over in sweet meditation and joy, with praise and thanksgiving. Carry it with you through the day and through the night, as you make your pilgrimage through this world. — Child of God, all that is Christ’s is yours and mine in him! — His Father is our Father. His God is our God. His

obedience is our obedience. His death is our death. His reward is our reward. His inheritance is our inheritance. His glory is our glory. His safety is our safety. We are one with him as he is one with the Father!

“Twixt Jesus and the chosen race
Subsists a bond of sovereign grace,
That hell, with its infernal train,
Shall ne'er dissolve nor rend in vain

This sacred bond shall never break,
Though earth should to her center shake;
Rest, doubting saint, assured of this,
For God has pledged His holiness.

He swore but once the deed was done;
'Twas settled by the Three in One;
Christ was appointed to redeem
All that the Father loved in Him.

Hail! Sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!

One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.

This sacred tie forbids their fears,
For all He is or has is theirs;
With Him, their Head, they stand or fall,
Their life, their surety, and their all.”

The sinner's Peace, the Daysman He,
Whose blood should set His people free;
On them His fond affections ran,
Before creation's work began

Blest be the wisdom and the grace,
Th' eternal love and faithfulness,
That's in the Gospel scheme revealed,
And is by God the Spirit sealed.”

Chapter 127
The Tomb Wasn't Empty

“The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, *and looked* into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and *to my God*, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things unto her.” (John 20:1-18)

We who believe in the risen Christ have entered into His rest, because He is resting at the right hand of the Father. We rest in Christ, the risen Redeemer, because His work is finished. His resurrection is the pledge that He has perfected forever them that are sanctified. He has finished all the salvation of His people; and we are complete in Him. It is my hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to set before you some restful thoughts, as we make a pilgrimage to the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and see the place where the Lord lay.

Once Died

The very first thing that must be remembered is this: — Christ Jesus once died. — “*For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God*” (Romans 6:10). So, as we gather around the place where the Lord Jesus slept “*with the rich in his death*,” seeing the stone rolled from the mouth of the tomb, we know he is not there. Yet, he assuredly was once there. — “*He was crucified, dead, and buried.*” He was as dead as the dead whose bodies are buried in the cemetery down the road. Though he could see no corruption, though he could not be held by the bands of death beyond the predestined time, yet he was once dead. There was a time when there was no light in his eye, no sound in his ear, no thought in his mind, and no word in his mouth, because there was no pulse of life in his heart. Christ died for our sins. He did not merely appear to be dead. He died unto sin once, because he was made sin for us. He was, therefore, buried in the sepulcher. A dead man is a fit occupant of the silent tomb. But, blessed be his name, he is not there now! He is risen from the dead. We look to the risen Christ as our only Savior and our only salvation (Romans 4:25-5:11). As we take another look at this portion of Holy Scripture, I want to call your attention to some memorials of the fact that our blessed Savior was once in the tomb, memorials that he has left for us in the tomb

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again

the third day according to the scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Sweet Spices

What memorials of this fact can be found in the tomb? How are they to be used by us? *First*, the Lord Jesus left sweet spices in the tomb. When he arose, he did not take those costly spices in which his body was wrapped with him. He left them behind. Joseph had brought about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the sweet aroma of those spices remained in the tomb. That tomb must have smelled like a perfume store, when Peter and John stepped into it.

What a blessed thought that is, when taken in a spiritual sense! Our Lord Jesus has filled the grave with sweet fragrances. It no longer smells of corruption and foul decay, but we can sing...

“Why should we tremble to convey
These bodies to the tomb?
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume.

The graves of all the saints He blessed
And softened every bed.
Where should the dying members rest
But with their dying Head?

Thence He arose, ascending high,
And showed our feet the way.
Up to the Lord we, too, shall fly
At that great rising-day.”

That bed awaiting our bodies beneath the earth is now perfumed with costly spices and decked with sweet flowers. There the truest Friend we have once laid his holy head. The angel’s first word to the women who came to the tomb was, “*Fear not ye*” (Matthew 28:5). We should never draw back with fear from the grave. Our Lord was once there; and where he goes no terror can remain. — “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*” (Psalm 23:4).

Grave Clothes

Next, we see here that our Savior left his grave clothes behind him in the tomb. When John stooped down and looked into the sepulcher, he saw the grave clothes carefully folded by themselves, laying to one side. Our Lord Jesus did not leave behind him a moldy shroud, but, as John tells us in verse 5, “*linen clothes*.”

He left those grave clothes for us to look upon as tokens of his fellowship with us in our low estate, as reminders that as he has cast aside the garments of death, so shall we. When he arose from his chamber, he left his bedclothes behind. And when we drop these bodies in death, as we ascend up to heaven, we will leave these garments of death behind (Psalms 17:5; 27:13; Isaiah 57:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9).

Look at it another way. We have seen old tattered flags hung up in places as the memorials of victory, memorials of defeated enemies and battles won. So in the tomb where the Savior vanquished death, his grave clothes are hung up as the trophies of his victory over death and assurances to us that we have been made more than conquerors through him that loved us. — “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*”

Take one more look at those linen grave clothes in the fragrant tomb. Do they not lay before your eye of faith as emblems of his righteousness, that righteousness by which he merits heavenly glory as our Surety, that righteousness he has made ours, by which we are made “*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*”? Nothing makes the grave more comfortable than the blessed assurance that we are the very righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. The garments of salvation we wear before our God are the blessed linen garments of perfect righteousness (Psalms 132:7-9; Revelation 14:4-5; 19:6-9)

The Napkin

Then, John tells us that Peter saw “*the napkin that was about his head*” carefully folded up and laid by itself. — “*Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.*”

I see that napkin in my Savior’s tomb still. It is the handkerchief with which the Lord God wipes every tear from my eyes. The widow and the orphan, the widower and the broken-hearted father, mourning brothers, and sisters, and friends, take this handkerchief and wipe their tears away forever. — “*Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy*” (Jeremiah 31:16). — “*Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead*” (Isaiah 26:19).

And with this same handkerchief, he wipes away all other tears from our eyes. Tears of repentance, tears of trouble, tears of fear, and tears of bereavement, all our tears our heavenly Father sweetly dries with this handkerchief of grace (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

Angels

Our Lord Jesus left something else in his tomb. He left angels behind him and made the grave...

“A cell which angels use
To come and go with heavenly news.”

Angels were not in the tomb before, but, at his resurrection, they descended. One rolled away the stone; and others sat where the Savior’s body once laid. I have never read that our Master has recalled the angels from the sepulchers of his saints. And we are assured that when his Lazaruses die, the angels of God carry their souls into the bosom of their Lord; and their bodies, too, shall be watched by guardian spirits, as surely as Michael kept the body of Moses until the resurrection.

A Way Out

Another thing was left behind in the tomb by our blessed Redeemer as a way out. He left an open passage from the tomb. The stone was rolled away. Why? Does he not by this remind us that Death is, for God’s elect, a prison without bars or doors? The open tomb tells me there is a Door open in Heaven. The risen Christ is the Way out of death for us. Blessed be his name, he is the Way, the Way of Life, the Way out of spiritual death!

From darkest night to brilliant light,
O praise His name, He lifted me!

And he who is the Way of Life, the Way out of spiritual death, is also for his ransomed ones, the Way out of physical death and the Way out of the second death (Revelation 20:1-6). Our mighty Samson has pulled up the posts and carried away the gates of the grave with all their bars. The key is taken from the girdle of death

and is held in the hand of the Prince of Life. As Peter, when he was visited by the angel, found that his chains fell off, while iron gates opened to him of their own accord, so shall the saints find ready escape at the resurrection morning. Yes, we shall sleep awhile, each one in his resting-place; but we shall rise again in the morning, for the stone is rolled away. A mighty Angel rolled away the stone, for it was very great, and when He had done the deed, He sat down upon the stone. His garment was white as snow, and His face like lightning, and as He sat on the stone, He seemed to say to death and hell, "Roll it back again if you can." — That mighty Angel who rolled away the stone from the tomb for us is Christ Himself!

Light

Our risen Savior left one more thing behind in his tomb for us. Tombs are places of utter darkness. But our Lord Jesus left in his tomb the brilliant light of life and immortality. — God "*hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.*" (2 Timothy 1:9-11)

Our Lord has gone into the tomb and illuminated it with his presence, "the lamp of his love is our guide through the gloom." He has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel; and now in every cemetery there is a light which shall burn through the watches of earth's night till the day break and the shadows flee away, and the resurrection morn shall dawn.

When I have breathed my final breath
And dropped this robe of flesh in death,
When my appointed work is done
And my allotted time is gone,
Don't stand around my grave and cry.
I'll not be there. I did not die.

My Savior came to call me home,
And I with Him to heav'n have gone!
Now I am free from sin and pain;
And with the glorified I reign!
Don't stand around my grave and cry.
I'm glorified! I did not die!

Seated with Jesus on His throne,
Glorified by what He has done,
I am a trophy of His grace.
Rejoicing, I behold His face:
Don't stand around my grave and cry.
I am with Christ! I did not die!

My body lies beneath the clay
Until the resurrection day.
In that day when Christ comes again,
Body and soul unite again!
Don't stand around my grave and cry.
Rejoice with me! I did not die!

Chapter 128
“Then were the disciples glad.”

“Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things unto her. Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20:18-31)

“*Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.*” — This was our Lord’s first appearance after his resurrection from the dead (Mark 16:9). Matthew tells of another appearance to the women as they went to tell his disciples (Matthew 28:9-10). Luke and Mark tell us that he appeared to two disciples as they were going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34; Mark 16:12-13). These appearances were all on the same day on which he arose. They all took place on Sunday, the first day of the week. The Apostle Paul reports several other appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ during the time between his resurrection and his ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-7).

After our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, the disciples always gathered for worship and the breaking of bread on Sunday, the first day of the week (the day of Christ’s resurrection). It was on this day that the Lord arose; and it was on this day that he first appeared to his disciples. Never again did the disciples observe a legal sabbath. The Gospel Sabbath of faith in Christ began with the resurrection on Sunday morning.

Sunday is not, as many call it, “the Christian Sabbath.” Christ is our Sabbath. We rest in him. Sunday is called “*the Lord’s Day*” (Revelation 1:10); but it is not a sabbath day. After the resurrection of our Lord, the disciples met on Sunday, the first day of the week, for worship, preaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and praise. We do not read anywhere in the New Testament of any congregation of Christians meeting on the Jewish Sabbath or observing any kind of sabbath day. The Apostles preached to the Jews assembled on Saturday; but no record is found of them meeting on Saturday for worship. And there is no record of them ever again observing a legal sabbath day of any kind, to any degree. Our Sabbath is Christ himself (Hebrews 4:3-10). We observe the sabbath spiritually by faith, resting in the Savior. Christ is our Rest, not a day but the Savior himself! All legal sabbath day observance is strictly forbidden in the New Testament (Colossians 2:16-23).

“*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.*” — Nothing gladdens the hearts of God’s elect like the manifest presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, bestowing his grace and speaking peace to our hearts. Child of God, as you think about your risen Savior, here are seven things which ought to make your heart glad.

The Peace He Gives

First, we are reminded that the peace Christ gives gladdens the hearts of his people. Twice the Lord Jesus addressed these disciples with the sweet, gentle, gracious words, "Peace be unto you." He who "*spake as never man spake*" said nothing without meaning. He spoke to these disciples with special emphasis because of their present state of mind, with special reference to the events of the last few days, and with special reference to their future days. "*Peace*" and not blame — "*peace*" and not fault-finding — "*peace*" and not rebuke — was the first word this little band of believers heard from their Master's lips after he arose from the tomb.

The Lord Jesus sent Mary to these disciples to prepare them for this most gracious visit; and what a refreshing and soul-satisfying visit it must have been! We hear no upbraiding for their recent desertions, nothing of reproach for their unbelief, no scolding for their failures, but all was mercy, love, and grace!

"*Peace on earth*" was the song of the heavenly host, when Christ was born. Peace and rest of soul was the general subject he continually preached for three years. Peace, and not riches, was the great legacy he left with the eleven the night before his crucifixion. It was in full keeping with the tenor of all our Lord's dealings, that, when he came to his disciples after his resurrection, his first word should be "*Peace*." It was a word that would soothe and calm their minds.

Peace is the key-note of the Gospel we preach, the Gospel he has sent us to preach: peace with God, peace by the blood of His cross, peace from God, the peace of God, peace between God and man by the precious blood of atonement, and peace between man and man by the gift of his grace. Christ has sent us to preach peace, spread peace, and practice peace.

Any religion, like that of Mahomet, which makes converts with the sword, is not from above, but from beneath. Any religion, like that of Rome, that burns men at the stake, in order to promote its own success, carries with it the stamp of hell and of antichrist. That religion which is the religion of the Prince of Peace is that which preaches, spreads, practices, and promotes peace — real, true peace.

Assuring Revelations

Second, how greatly our hearts are gladdened by those blessed, sweet revelations of our Lord Jesus which assure us of his accomplishments as our Mediator. Can you imagine what that first meeting of the Church after the Lord's death must have been like? The disciples had heard the reports of the Lord's resurrection; but they did not believe them (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:11). They must have been terribly confused, very fearful, shamefully unbelieving, yet a little hopeful.

Then the Lord Jesus appeared in their midst and showed them his wounds! Our Lord Jesus very gently and graciously gave his beloved disciples this remarkable, assuring evidence of his resurrection and of their redemption. — He showed them "*his hands and his side*."

Without question, the Savior was, in this action, both identifying himself to them and assuring them that he had really risen from the dead in a real body. He bade them see with their own eyes, that he had a real material body, and that he was not a spirit or a ghost. "*Handle me and see*," were his words. "*A spirit hath not flesh and bone, as ye see me have*," he said (Luke 24:39). Great indeed was the condescension of our blessed Master in thus coming down to the feeble faith of his disciples!

Yet, there is more here than a mere proof of our Lord's bodily resurrection. Showing them his hands and side and feet, our Lord Jesus showed them assuring tokens of redemption with which he entered into heaven as our Representative, tokens of redemption that would everlastingly plead for them in glory.

The Lord had said in his commission to Mary that she should say to his brethren, “*I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, to my God, and your God.*” By showing them his wounds he said, “In my ascension, these wounds will appear for you. And all the petitions you send to heaven by me, I will put into these pierced hands and present you and your prayers to our Father and our God.”

The primary reason for showing the disciples his wounds was to convince them that he had indeed risen and that the reports given by the women and the two disciples (which they did not believe – Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:11) were true. But the wounds and scars of our Lord Jesus were and forever shall be proof of his great love for those whom he redeemed, and evidence of our full salvation in and by Him (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The disciples rejoiced and were glad when it finally dawned upon them that it was their Lord standing in their midst, that he was alive again and that he had accomplished redemption by the sacrifice of himself. As these disciples were then made glad when they saw the Lord, so we are made glad with every spiritual manifestation of our crucified, risen, ascended, exalted Saviour today as we seek to worship him in private and in our public assemblies of worship with his saints.

Our Commission

Third, I want us to see that we are sent by our Savior into this world, just as He was sent by His Father, for the salvation of his elect (vv. 21-23).

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.”

The Lord Jesus has left us here as his witnesses, that we might preach his Gospel to all men, for the salvation of his elect. This is our commission (Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:13-16). By the preaching of the Gospel, the sins of eternity bound men and women are either remitted or retained (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). How honored and how glad we ought to be to have this trust given to us!

Neglected Worship

Fourth, if you will look at verses 24 and 25, you will see that when we absent ourselves from the house of God, when we neglect the assembly of God’s saints for worship, we deprive ourselves of great blessings.

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Our Lord had appeared to his disciples and convinced them that he had indeed risen from the dead. He had given them the Holy Spirit to empower them for their ministry to the world. But Thomas was not present with them when the Lord appeared.

We do not know where he was or why he was not there, but there is a lesson to be learned from his absence. He missed the joy of seeing the risen Lord. He missed hearing our Lord’s words of peace. And he missed the peace and assurance itself as evidenced by his words in the next verse, “*I will not believe.*”

The Spirit of God tells us plainly that we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Such neglect leads to spiritual leanness, snares, and temptations, and missed blessings. The

house of God, the assembled Church of God for worship, is the place where God our Savior meets with his people and makes himself known (Matthew 18:20). This is the place from which he sends out his Word. Public worship is the most important aspect of every believer's life (Hebrews 10:23-29).

Restoring Grace

Fifth, in verses 26-29 we see how gracious and merciful our dear Savior is to his poor, weak, sinful people in the exercise of his indescribable restoring grace.

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.”

The disciples found Thomas and with great joy and assurance of faith told him that they had “*seen the Lord.*” They not only had the testimony of the women and the angels, but they saw him with their own eyes. Still, Thomas said, “*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*”

Thomas was present at the raising of Lazarus, and had heard Christ himself say that he would rise from the dead, and now had the testimony of his friends that the Lord was risen. Still he did not believe. How great and inexcusable our unbelief is! How stubborn these vile hearts are! Yes, there is in us all “*an evil heart of unbelief*” that would depart from our God (Hebrews 3:12).

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it!
Prone to leave the God I love!
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above!”

Thank God, he overrules our unbelief and is faithful to us when we are unfaithful to him (2 Timothy 2:13). Where sin abounds, his grace much more abounds!

Christ's Divinity

Sixth, our hearts are made glad by every reminder that he who is our Savior is himself our God, as Thomas confessed him to be. What a glorious confession Thomas gave once the Lord Jesus, in his boundless mercy, had granted him restoring grace. — “*My Lord and my God!*” Blessed be his name, Jesus Christ is God! None but God could redeem us, justify us, make us holy, and bring us to heaven.

Wonders Performed

Seventh, our hearts ought to be made glad every time we are reminded that all the wonders performed by our Lord Jesus Christ in this world are designed for us, that we might believe (vv. 30-31).

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

Everything our great God and Savior does is a wonder. — “*Thou art the God that doest wonders*” (Psalm 77:14). And he does his wonders for us, for the everlasting salvation of chosen sinners (Romans 8:28). By believing on Christ, and through his blessed name, we have eternal life, access to the throne, and acceptance before God (Acts 2:36; 4:11-12; Romans 3:19-24; 4:22-25; 1 John 5:10-13). — Wondrous grace!

“On this wise showed he himself.”

“After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he *himself*. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt *his* fisher’s coat *unto him*, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come *and* dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.” (John 21:1-14)

How does the Lord Jesus show himself? How does our blessed Savior make himself known to his people? When does he come to his own? When does he make himself known? We should always come to the house of God and to the Word of God desiring to see our blessed Savior and hear his voice. — “*He standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice*” (Song of Solomon 2:9). We come here to his Word, and come to his house in public worship with his saints, hoping that our Lord Jesus will be pleased to look forth at the window of his Word and show himself through the lattice of his ordinances, as we gather in his name for prayer, praise, and the preaching of the gospel.

Did he not promise, “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20)? Did he not tell us, “*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him*” (John 14:21)? Yet, how often we are compelled to ask, “*Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*” (John 14:22).

How does the Lord Jesus show himself? We might find some answers to that question in this closing chapter of John’s Gospel. “*On this wise showed he himself.*” After our Lord arose from the dead, he appeared to Mary and twice to his disciples, and showed himself to seven of the disciples who had gone to Galilee according to his instructions (Matthew 28:10, 16). These appearances were more than just physical appearances in order that they could see him and know that he lives. They were more than mere proofs of his resurrection. In these post-resurrection appearances our blessed Savior manifested himself in his divine majesty, his resurrected glory, his love and compassion for his people, and his finished redemptive work, showing forth his glory as our risen, triumphant Savior.

Recorded Appearances

There are the twelve recorded appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection in the New Testament. There may have been many more; we do not know (Acts 1:3). These twelve are recorded for us in the Book of God.

1. To Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).
2. To the women (Matthew 28:9-10).

3. To Cleopas and His Companion (Luke 24:13-35).
4. To Simon (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5).
5. To the Disciples, Thomas being Absent (John 20:19-23).
6. To the Disciples, Thomas being Present (John 20:24-29).
7. To the Seven at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14).
8. To the Disciples on the Mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20).
9. To the Five Hundred (1 Corinthians 15:6).
10. To James, the Lord's Brother (1 Corinthians 15:7).
11. To the Eleven Disciples on Olivet, Near Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-11; Luke 24:50-51).
12. To Paul on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-7).

Special Revelation

But after his resurrection, our Lord Jesus never showed himself to anyone except his disciples. And they saw him only as he made himself known to them. Though he stood before them and spoke to them, though they saw him physically, none could see him and know who he was except by special revelation, except Christ reveal himself to them. So it is now.

This fact is important. By it we see that the resurrection was never intended to be a proof of anything to unbelievers. This fact also teaches us that any profitable sight of our Lord Jesus Christ, any sight of him that is beneficial to our souls, any saving, sight and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is spiritual. — Not Carnal — Not Academic — Not Visionary — But Spiritual! We cannot see the Lord Jesus, at any time, or know his presence, or hear his voice, except as he is pleased to make himself known to us. All who are yet without Christ, without life, without faith, without God, and without hope, must forever remain as they are unless the Lord Jesus makes himself known to them by the mighty operations of his grace (2 Corinthians 4:6; Genesis 1:1-3).

The same thing is true of us who are the Lord's. Though we are born again, though we live by faith in Christ, though we live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and are filled with the Holy Ghost, as all heaven-born souls are, we cannot (at any time, in any circumstances, or under any conditions) see and know our blessed Savior, except he make himself known to us by the wonderful, mighty operations of his grace on our behalf. Though the Lord Jesus stood before Mary and talked to her, she did not see him and did not know him until he made himself known to her. Though the risen Savior walked with and taught those disciples on the road to Emmaus, they did not see him and did not know him until he made himself known to them. Though the blessed Savior miraculously stepped into their midst on that first day, that first Sunday evening after he was risen, they did not see him and did not know him until he made himself known to them. The same is true of us today! O blessed Savior, graciously make yourself known to our souls day by day, and hour by hour, that we may walk joyfully with you!

The only way we can see the Lord Jesus Christ, the only way we can behold the glory of God in the Person and work of his dear Son is by faith in Christ; and that faith by which we behold him is his own gift of grace. — *“On this wise showed he himself.”* This appearance of our Lord Jesus to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias indicates that there are specific times when the Savior comes to his own; and that he always comes to us for a specific reason, to give us grace to help in our time of need. Here are seven specific seasons when we may expect our dear Savior to show himself to us as he does not to the world.

Undeserving

First, the Lord Jesus shows himself to his chosen when we are most undeserving. He came to these poor disciples after a night of great fault and of sad failure (vv. 2-3).

“There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and

the [sons] of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.”

Seven of the disciples were assembled together in a certain place not far from the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias). Peter said, “Boys, I’m going back to my fishing business.” Fishing was his business and occupation before he met the Master. Peter, having denied the Savior, unsure of his Master’s purpose for him, and being a man of action more than contemplation and waiting, decided to go back to the boats and nets. It seems clear to me that Peter turned his back on preaching the gospel, and made up his mind to return to his former occupation, fishing.

The other disciples were ready to follow where Peter led, and they said, “Wait up, we’ll go with you.” Obviously, they still owned their boats and nets. Why they kept them, we are not told; but they did; and those boats and nets became a snare to their souls. — Let every preacher be warned. Sell all and follow Christ. Make it your business to disentangle yourself with the cares of this world. Make it your relentless determination to be continually “*separated unto the Gospel of God*” (Romans 1:1).

Those poor, fallen preachers (All had forsaken the Savior. Peter had denied him.) went back to their fishing business, entered one of their ships, as they had done all their lives, and fished all night. But on this night something very unusual happened. — They caught nothing!

Our Lord Jesus is sovereign over the fish of the sea; and he graciously kept his fallen disciples from having any success that night. “They had been called,” Pastor Henry Mahan wrote, “to be fishers of men, not fishermen of this sort.” Failure and disappointment are often instruments our God uses to prepare us for some blessed, sweet experience of his grace. If the Lord permits his own to fall, it is that he might lift us up and, in the lift, reveal himself the more gracious and glorious.

Daybreak

Second, our dear Savior shows himself to his chosen at daybreak. — “*But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus*” (v. 4). In the Revised Version those words are translated, — “When the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the shore.” Whenever the Lord Jesus comes to us and shows himself to us, it is the breaking of a fresh, new day to our souls (Isaiah 12:1-6; 25:9)!

When Christ first appears to his elect in conversion, the daybreak of Grace is begun in the heaven-born soul! When the Day Star (2 Peter 1:19) arises in our hearts, when the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) arises in our souls, with healing in his wings, a new day begins! And when the Savior shows himself after a season of darkness, it is the breaking of day to our souls. Sorrow may endure for the night; but joy comes in the morning when he appears!

Confession

Third, the Son of God shows himself to his chosen, sweetly forcing us to make confession of our need of him (vv. 4-5). Morning dawned and the Lord Jesus stood on the shore. The disciples were only about one hundred yards offshore. They could both see him and hear him; but they did not know that it was the Lord. He asked if they had caught any fish; and they said, “No.”

He did not ask this question for information, or because he did not know the answer. He asked, “*Children, have ye taken any meat?*” to draw their attention to the fact that their return to their old occupation was a total failure, to sweetly and graciously force them to confess their complete failure and inability, and to

make them attentive to the miracle he was about to perform, to prepare them for the great revelation of his goodness. Robert Hawker calls our attention to the fact that...

“The want of success in those fishers, and the Lord Jesus early in the morning standing on the shore, formed a blessed occasion for the manifestation of his person and grace, which were to follow. When the Lord is about to reveal himself to his people, how graciously he sometimes prepares the way for the greater display of his love!”

Have we not proved, again and again, that our dear Savior can and does supply all the needs of his redeemed (Philippians 4:19)?

His Greatness

Fourth, our Lord Jesus Christ shows himself to his chosen to display his greatness as God our Savior. — “*And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find*” (v. 6).

I have no idea how to adequately explain this. Experienced fishermen are not likely to obey the instructions of a stranger standing on the shore. Yet, at the command of the Lord Jesus to “*cast the net on the right side of the ship,*” they obeyed without hesitation. They had toiled all night to no purpose, and now that the day was breaking, they had given up all hope. But the authoritative voice of that stranger on the shore, so full of promise, was heard and immediately obeyed.

This is an obvious display of our Lord’s absolute sovereignty. He never commands anything that is not done! The disciples had no idea who it was that spoke to them; but they obeyed his voice as readily and quickly as the angels of heaven obey the voice of the Almighty.

Our Lord will sometimes leave us to ourselves, not only to show us how utterly impotent we are, but also to make us know more fully his divine greatness as God our Savior, and to teach us to look to him, not to ourselves, for everything.

Success

Fifth, our gracious Master shows himself to his chosen to give us success. Look at verse 6 again. — “*They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes!*” By this great display of his power, the Lord Jesus made himself known to these disciples he so dearly loved (vv. 7-8).

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt [his] fisher’s coat [unto him], (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.”

No doubt they remembered another incident similar to this (Luke 5:4-11). No doubt they also remembered the parable by which the Lord Jesus had taught them (Matthew 13:47-51). Gospel preaching is compared to fishing, but with a net, never with a hook and line. If you fish with a hook, you have to cover the hook and deceive the fish. If you fish with a hook and bait, the catch depends in some measure on the skill of the fisherman. But, if you fish with a net, everything depends on God. — You have to wait for God to put the fish in the net!

Both the disciples and the fish obeyed the Lord Jesus. At his command, the disciples cast the net on the right side of the ship; and 153 fish swam into the net on the right side of the ship!

As I read this story I cannot help thinking, “How near and dear to his heart the Lord’s people must be!” He says now as much as he did then, “*Children, have ye any meat? Cast on the right side, and ye shall find.*” If we fail to seek our spiritual sustenance from him, he will be found of them that seek him not. Oh, how often the Lord Jesus makes himself known by his gracious acts as well as by his Word! He makes himself known by his providence and by his grace in countless instances where we least expected him.

Surely, these gospel preachers were taught by this experience, and we should be, that the success of our labor in the gospel is the Lord’s doing alone. Nothing depends on us. Everything depends on him!

Provision

Sixth, our ever gracious Savior, Jehovah-Jesus, Jehovah-jireh, shows himself to his chosen to provide our needs (vv. 9-11).

“As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.”

Even in his resurrection body, the Lord Jesus was not unmindful of the bodies of his cold and hungry disciples. This is another manifestation of his love and care for his own. The meal provided was not a sumptuous feast; but it was according to his manner as the Shepherd of his flock and according to their need. And it was miraculously provided.

The Son of God always goes before us in his providential arrangements for our souls. How we ought to rejoice in every token of his eternal purpose, his sovereign providence, and his special prevenient grace, all exercised on our behalf!

Communion

Seventh, the Lord Jesus shows himself to his chosen to give us the joy of sweet communion with himself (vv. 12-14).

“Jesus saith unto them, Come [and] dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.”

Our dear Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, has a way of giving, whereby he makes himself known. — “*And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight*” (Luke 24:30-31). Here are these poor, sinful, fallen disciples sitting with the risen Lord of Glory. As they sat down to breakfast with the Master, they must have recalled how he had once fed the multitudes with the same fare as he now fed them, a few fish and a loaf of bread (John 6:1-14). They were awestruck in his presence. How utterly unworthy they must have felt, yet how welcome!

We usually have the most conscious, humbling sense of ourselves when the Lord Jesus makes himself known to us in his most bounteous and free acts of mercy, love, and grace. When the all gracious Christ of God and the poor, needy sinner meet, the sweetest fellowship known to man on this earth commences! None of the disciples asked any questions, for they knew that it was the Lord. Their doubts, unbelief, and questions about his resurrection were all resolved by his presence!

The disciples came from their defeat, frustration, and failure at sea to find a fire kindled and a meal of bread and fish prepared for them by the Son of God. What a lesson there is in this for those who preach the gospel! We are unable to provide anything in our own strength, but by his grace, he will fully meet all our needs. His grace is sufficient! The Savior's provisions are so complete that nothing of ours need be added. The command, when he provides, is simply, "*Come and dine, for all things are ready.*"

So it is in redemption. — "*Christ is all and in all.*" All we bring to him is our emptiness, our need, and our sin. We stand before him and his spiritual blessings as these weary, hungry disciples stood before that meal. It was all provided by their loving Lord. The law demands; but Christ gives (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Colossians 2:9-10; Ephesians 1:3-6).

“Jesus has a table spread
Where poor, needy souls are fed,
He invites His chosen people,
Come and dine;
With His manna He does feed
And supplies our every need.
O 'tis sweet to sup with Jesus —
Come and dine!

The disciples came to land,
Thus obeying Christ's command,
For the Master called unto them,
Come and dine;
There they found their heart's desire,
Bread and fish upon the fire;
Thus He satisfies the hungry every time! —
Come and dine!

Soon the Lamb will take His bride
To be ever at His side,
All the host of Heaven will assembled be;
Come and dine;
O twill be a glorious sight,
All the saints in spotless white;
And with Jesus they will feast eternally. —
Come and dine!

Come and dine, the Master calleth, Come and dine;
You may feast at Jesus' table, Come and dine!
He Who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine,
To the hungry calleth now, Come and dine!"

Eat, O friends! Come and dine. "*Behold, all things are now ready!*" — Come and dine!

Chapter 130
“Lovest thou me?”

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

This is the third, perhaps even the fourth time that the Lord has shown himself to Peter after his resurrection. Until now not a word had passed between them. Peter had not spoken to the Savior; and the Lord Jesus had not spoken directly to Peter. The matter of Peter’s denial of the Lord Jesus has not been mentioned, neither by the Lord Jesus, nor by Peter. How Peter must have longed to speak to his Lord privately, to confess his shame and beg forgiveness; but the Lord Jesus had not allowed it. Now Christ is alone with Peter, at some distance from the other disciples. And it is the Lord Jesus who opens the conversation. What will he say? How will he reprove this fallen one? How will he deal with Peter’s sin?

“*Lovest thou me?*” — A more important question could not be considered. More than two thousand years have passed since our Lord Jesus first asked Peter this question. But it is just as searching and useful today as it was then. Love is something everyone understands. It is a feeling, an emotion, a passion that God has implanted in the human nature. Everybody loves somebody. No one is incapable of love. May God the Holy Ghost make a place in our hearts for the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is worthy of all the love of our hearts. Oh, for grace to love him who loved us and gave himself for us!

This is not a matter of fanaticism, enthusiasm, or emotionalism. It is a subject that deserves the reasonable consideration of everyone who professes faith in Christ and claims to be a Christian. The Son of God asks, “*Lovest thou me?*” This is a simple fact: All true Christians love Christ (1 John 4:19), and any who do not love Christ are not Christians, are not believers, and are not saved.

Christ’s Purpose

First, I want to show you that our Lord’s purpose in squeezing this confession of love from Peter was altogether gracious. The test our Savior put to Peter, by which he would prove his sincerity to him, was love. The Lord Jesus did not ask, “Have you honored me, or obeyed me, or what proofs can you give of performing your duties toward me, or do you live for me? He asked just one thing: “*Lovest thou me?*”

Many have imagined that our Savior asked Peter this question three times to remind him of the fact that he had denied him three times; but there is no indication that that was the case. In fact, I am confident it was not our Lord’s intention here to aggravate Peter’s sense of guilt and shame, but to prove to his dear disciple his grace toward him and his interest in that grace.

The well-known and long proved love and grace of Christ Jesus to his elect inclines me to think that the Savior asked Peter this question (“*Lovest thou me?*”) three times that he might give his fallen child the opportunity to openly repeat his own assurance of his love for Christ three times. Having declared, with assurance, “Lord, I truly do love you,” was the Lord’s way of making Peter understand that his threefold denial was no indication of his true character as a child of God. That was not really Peter, but sin dwelling in him (Romans 7:15-20).

Instead of being a display of our Lord’s displeasure, his appearance and conversation with Peter appears to me to have been one of those countless instances we have on record of the tenderness of our dear Savior to

his people, by which he repeatedly shows us where sin abounds grace much more abounds! When his chosen display great weakness, he manifests great grace. When we fall, he lifts us up, and in the sweet exercise of his grace to us enables us to show greater love to him. Our Lord's gracious intention in squeezing this open confession of love from Peter is manifest when we realize that the very thing that terrifies the hypocrite comforts the true believer; and that is our Lord's omniscience. — *"Thou knowest all things!"* He knows what I am by nature, what I have done, what he has done for me, what he has made me by his grace, and what I am in him. It is written, *"By his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many!"* And here Peter confesses, *"Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that i love thee."*

How very gracious our Savior is! He came to Peter in his utter despair, when in a state of great shame, and squeezed from him this firm confession of love for his Savior at a time when no one else could have done so. Not only that, the Lord Jesus further assured Peter that he had committed to him the care of his lambs and his sheep. It is as if the Savior had said, "Yes, Peter, I am fully aware of your great love for me, so much so that I trust to your care the people of my love!"

Pastors Work

Second, it is the work of every under shepherd, the work of every Gospel preacher, the work of every pastor to feed the Lord's sheep. Christ is the great Shepherd of the sheep. He is the great Pastor of his flock. It is Christ himself who feeds his sheep. He is both the life and sustenance of all his fold. He is the Bread of Life and the Water of Life. His flesh is meat indeed; and his blood is drink indeed.

Yet, our dear Savior condescends to give his flock under-shepherds, under-pastors, according to his own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding (1 Peter 5:1-4). The Lord's faithful under-shepherds feed his lambs, his young ones, gently. These pastors feed the sheep of the fold and lead them. The first and primary qualification of a pastor is love for Christ. — A man's abilities as a speaker and a leader, even if he possesses the greatest possible knowledge, are nothing without this love of the heart for Christ.

Believers Love

Third, I want you to see that every true believer loves the Lord Jesus Christ. Many are utterly confused about what a Christian is. Many foolishly imagine that anyone raised in a "Christian country," or in a "Christian home," or in a country under the influence of Christianity is a Christian. Many think that all who profess faith in Christ, all who have been baptized in the name of Christ, all who attend the worship of Christ are Christians. But it is not so. A Christian is a person who has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. A Christian is one who has been born again by the Spirit of Christ. A Christian is one who lives by faith in Christ. A Christian is a person who seeks in all things to follow, obey, and honor Christ. But there is more. A Christian is a person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. If a person truly loves Christ, all is well, if not, all is wrong (John 8:42; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

Love for Christ is the inseparable companion of saving faith (1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:6). Love cannot usurp nor take the place of faith. It is not love that unites the soul with Christ, but faith. It is not love that draws the waters of grace from the wells of salvation, but faith. It is not love that brings peace to the conscience, but faith. But wherever faith lives, love lives.

Love is the motive and mainspring of all work for Christ (2 Corinthians 8:7). Very little, if anything, is done for Christ from a sense of duty, or merely from a knowledge of right and wrong. The heart must be interested before the hands will be engaged. Those who have done great things in the name of Christ were not men who merely held to a creed. They were people who loved a Person! Duty tithes. Love gives. Duty goes to church. Love comes to worship. Duty reads the Word. Love seeks to understand it. Duty will do some things for Christ. Loves lives for Christ!

Love for Christ is the common point of unity for all believers. We may have many differences with our brethren in other churches and denominations. But here we are one. All true Christians love Christ. Love for Christ gives us a common meeting point. Love for Christ gives us unity. Love for Christ dissolves cultural, racial, and social differences (Colossians 3:11).

Love for Christ will be the distinguishing mark of all the redeemed in heaven. That multitude which no man can number will be of one mind. Old differences will be forgotten. Old carnal debates will be dropped. In heaven around the Throne of Grace, all will be of one mind and one heart. All will love Christ (Revelation 1:5-6).

The Cause

Would you know the secret of this love? What is it that causes saved sinners to love the Son of God? Read 1 John 4:19, and learn the secret. — *“We love him because he first loved us.”* No son or daughter of Adam ever loved Christ by nature. *“The carnal mind is enmity against God.”* But all who are born of God love Christ *“because he first loved us.”*

His love for us precedes our love for him by eternity (Jeremiah 31:3). His love for us exceeds our love for him by infinity (Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10). And Christ’s love for us is the cause of our love for him. — *“We love Him because He first loved us!”*

“We love him” because of who he is, and because of what he has done for us. He chose us in everlasting love and redeemed us with his own precious blood, kept us for himself throughout the days of our rebellion and unbelief unto the appointed time of our calling. He called us by omnipotent mercy, effectually creating life and faith in us by his grace. He has forgiven us, justified us, sanctified us, and made us *“meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!”* And it is our dear Savior who keeps us in the midst of our countless trials, temptations and falls, and will not let us go! Therefore, we love him.

“We love him because” of all he is doing for us in providence, working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28), all his unending intercession on our behalf in Heaven, and because of his daily, all-sufficient grace and unending mercies. Should any believer be asked, “Why do you love the Lord?” He has his own *“because”* to give.

“I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice *and* my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon *him* as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God *is* merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, *and* my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men *are* liars. What shall I render unto the LORD *for* all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.” (Psalms 116:1-13)

Love Can Be Known

Yet, there are some who would have us to believe that this matter of love for Christ is something that cannot be known in this world. So I want you to see in the last place that love for Christ, or the lack of it, is something that can and should be known. Love is not ambiguous. It is not something we have to guess about. And love for Christ is something that a person may and should know.

J. C. Ryle wrote, “How do we know whether we love any person here upon earth? In what manner does love show itself between people in this world? Between husband and wife? Between parent and child? Between brother and sister? Between friend and friend? Let these questions be answered by common sense and observation...and the knot before us is untied.” Then he gave eight simple marks by which love is known. By these eight things, if we will be honest with ourselves, every person reading these lines can answer the Lord’s question — “*Lovest thou me?*” If I love a person....

1. I like to think about him. He dwells in my heart (Ephesians 3:17).
2. I like to hear about him.
3. I like to read about him.
4. I like to please him.
5. I like his friends.
6. I am jealous to promote and protect his name and honor.
7. I like to talk to him.
8. I like to be with him.

Consider this question seriously. Examine it carefully. And answer it honestly — “*Lovest thou me?*” “*Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*” I do not love him as I should. I do not love him as I would. And I do not love him as I hope I soon shall. But I do love him.

“Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Behold my heart and see;
And turn each odious idol out
That dares to rival Thee.

Thou knowest I love Thee, dearest Lord;
But, oh, I long to soar
Far from the sphere of mortal joys,
And learn to love Thee more!”

If you do not love Christ, it is because you do not know Christ. Your soul is in great danger! You are lost, a child of wrath, and the wrath of God is upon you. The only remedy for your lack of love is a revelation of Christ in you. Make it your business to attend the ministry of the Word. Hear the Gospel, for “*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*” Pray for the grace of God the Holy Spirit. Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you love Christ, don’t ever be ashamed for others to see it and know it. Witness for him. Live for him. Work for him. Devote yourself to him (Romans 12:1-2). We cannot love Christ too fully, live for him too thoroughly, confess him too boldly, or devote ourselves to him too heartily. — “*To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much!*”

Chapter 131
“*What is that to Thee?*”

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (John 21:18-25)

In the New Testament, every time anyone came to our Lord and complained to him about what someone else was doing, or was not doing, what someone else might do or might not do, he rebuked them sharply (Luke 9:49-50; 10:38-50; John 21:18-25).

Background

The Lord Jesus gave his last message to his disciples. You can read the Savior’s final instructions to his Church in chapters 13-16. In chapter 17, he offered his great high priestly prayer to God the Father as our Mediator. Then, in chapter 18, we see him in the garden, praying with Peter, James, and John, anticipating all that he must suffer as our Substitute, when a band of soldiers, led by Judas, came to arrest him.

When these soldiers came to arrest him, Peter arose immediately to defend his Master, without regard for his own life (v. 10). Our Savior voluntarily gave himself up to be crucified by wicked men, but only upon the condition that his own elect would be spared (vv. 8-12). The Savior was led away to the judgment hall, where Peter denied him three times (18:27).

Then, our blessed Substitute accomplished our redemption by the sacrifice of himself upon the cursed tree (19:28-30). On the third day¹, early in the morning, the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the grave, triumphing over it for us (20:1-17). He appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. He appeared to the disciples, Thomas being absent. Then he appeared to them one week later when Thomas was present. Now, in chapter 21, he appears a third time to his disciples, specifically to restore Peter, to confirm his love to Peter, and to confirm (in Peter’s own mind) Peter’s love to him.

You know the story. When Peter had publicly confessed, “*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee,*” the Lord gave him this charge — “*Feed my sheep.*” Peter had denied his Master three times. Here he confesses his heartfelt love for Christ three times, and is commissioned by the Lord three times to feed His people. Now, read verse 22. — “*Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*”

The Question

¹ There seems to be a difficulty here. It is obvious that our Lord, being crucified on Friday afternoon and resurrected on Sunday morning was in the grave (to our way of thinking) only one full day (Saturday), the Friday evening preceding it and Sunday morning following it. But that is no problem at all. The Jews calculated any part of a night or day as a whole. Calculating as they did, our Lord was in the tomb the day and night of Friday, the day and night of Saturday, and the night (the time preceding dawn) and day of Sunday.

“*What is that to thee?*” That is the question I want to address. John concludes his Gospel narrative, and our Lord Jesus here concludes his time on earth by teaching Peter and us a lesson that is very hard for us to learn. — We must leave God’s servants and God’s people to God’s care. — “*Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand*” (Romans 14:4).

God’s people are God’s people. They’re not yours; and they’re not mine. They’re his. God’s servants are God’s servants. They’re not yours; and they’re not mine. They’re his. I sure wish we could learn that! They are not to be judged by us. They are not to be controlled by us. Their lives are not to be run by us. Religion binds people. Christ sets them free.

It is absolutely none of your business or mine how someone else serves Christ. It is none of your business or mine what someone else does for his Master, or doesn’t do. It is none of your business or mine what someone else gives, or doesn’t give. The Lord God almighty is perfectly capable of taking care of his own. Besides, most of us have a full time job, with plenty of overtime, taking care of ourselves! So let us “*study to be quiet, and to do our own business, and to work with our own hands,*” as we have been commanded (1 Thessalonians 4:11). — It is absolutely none of your business or mine how someone else serves Christ. — “*To his own Master he stands or falls.*”

Grace Assured

The Lord Jesus told Peter how that he would be required to suffer and die for the glory of God. Impetuous and sometimes fickle in his youth, Peter was assured that in the end he would be faithful unto death. And he was. He was crucified at Rome because of his faithfulness to Christ. When the Lord Jesus gave Peter this word of assurance, he said to him, “*Follow me*” (vv. 18-19).

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.”

An Evil Question

Then, as they walked along the beach, Peter saw John following. That is what a disciple is supposed to do. But when Peter saw John, he said, “Lord, you have told me what I must do, but what about John, what is he to do?” — (vv. 20-21)

“Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*?”

That may appear to be a perfectly innocent question; but it was horribly evil. It was a question that arose from Peter’s proud heart. It ought never to have been asked. It was a question that would, if entertained, be sure to cause a division among the Lord’s disciples and lead to other evils. At that point, the Lord must have stopped, turned to Peter, and looking squarely into his eyes, he gave this stern admonition and reproof — “*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me*” (v. 22).

Here is a message directly from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ to you and me. He says, “*What is that to thee? Follow thou me!*” It is our responsibility in all things ever to follow Christ; but it is never our responsibility to determine what another disciple is doing, or even concern ourselves about what another is doing or not doing. If we could learn this one thing, it would put an end to every problem there is in the Church and Kingdom of God. All the strife and division that exists among true believers can be traced to this one, proud evil. — We all concern ourselves with what others are doing and not doing, when we ought to concern ourselves only with what the Lord would have us do.

Our Primary Responsibility

Our primary responsibility in life is to follow Christ. I know the consequences, ramifications, and implications of what I am saying. I know what it will cost us if we dare to do what the Lord commands. But, oh how I pray that God will give us grace to hear and obey his Word.

The main business of your life and mine, the primary, all-consuming business of your life and mine is to follow Christ. We live in vain if we do not live for God! Indeed, it were better for you and me had we never been born, than that we should live and die without Christ. The Lord Jesus says to you and me, *“Follow me...Follow thou me!”*

This is the command of the Gospel. Many today try to separate salvation from discipleship. They suggest that there may be faith in Christ without the following of Christ. But that is not so. In Bible terms, to believe on Christ is to follow Christ (Matthew 4:18-22; 16:24-26; 19:20-22).

If you are yet without Christ, you would be wise to make the salvation of your immortal soul the primary concern of your life. Make your soul your first care, if necessary, to the neglect of all other things. What shall it profit you, if you should gain the whole world and lose your own soul? If you are without Christ, you are under the wrath of God, cursed and condemned because of your sin. If you die without Christ, you shall forever suffer the wrath of God in hell. Will you follow Christ and be forever saved; or will you follow your own devices and be forever damned? (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19). To follow Christ is to seek him. To follow Christ is to trust him. To follow Christ is to submit to his dominion as your Lord. To follow Christ is to be saved by him. — *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”* This is the Lord’s commandment to you: — *“Follow thou me!”*

This is also the character of faith. Faith follows Christ. My brothers and sisters in the grace of God, having been saved by Christ, having been washed in his precious blood, robed in his perfect righteousness, and born again by his Holy Spirit, our Master’s word to us is — *“Follow thou me!”*

The main, primary, all-encompassing business of our lives is to follow Christ. When sin is pardoned and salvation is secure, the one thing we must do is follow Christ. Peter was a believer, a preacher, and an Apostle. And this was our Lord’s command to him: — *“Follow Me...Follow thou Me!”* C. H. Spurgeon said, “The one thing we are to aim at is, to tread in Christ’s footsteps, to do what he did; and, as far as he is imitable by us, to do it as he did it, and to be as he was in the midst of the sons and daughters of men.” It is our business in this world to imitate the Son of God in all things. That is what the grace of God teaches all who are taught of God (Titus 2:11-14).

A disciple is one who learns to live the life his teacher lives. Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher teaches. It is getting to be what the teacher is. And Christianity is more than believing the doctrine of Christ. Christianity is following Christ. It is seeking to mold my life after Christ. If I am a child of God, I am not a follower of Calvin, Gill, or Spurgeon, or any other mere man. I am a follower of Christ. I seek to mold my doctrine, my thoughts, my words, my character, and my deeds after the example of Christ. Christ himself is the rule and pattern of my life (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21).

We are trees of God’s planting, set in his vineyard to bring forth fruit for God’s praise. If we would do what we were created to do, we must follow Christ. This is the life, the character, and the business of faith (Philippians 3:7-21).

God has given every believer a place, position, and gifts in which to serve him, which no one else can occupy. This is the vocation to which we are called. No matter what your earthly occupation is, if you are in Christ, you are first and foremost his servant. That is your occupation. God has put you where you are, with the gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities you have to influence and minister to other people, people no one else can reach, for the glory of his name. All saved sinners are missionaries. All saved sinners are his witnesses. That is what a missionary is — His Witness! All saved sinners are martyrs, men and women who voluntarily lay down their lives for him, in his cause.

I do not believe that any child of God was created just to run a business, keep records, build houses, connect water pipes, sell insurance, or teach school. There is something greater for you and me to do. We were created to serve the cause of God our Savior in the place of our calling, for the glory of his name (1 Corinthians 7:20-24). God has put you and me where we are, with the gifts, talents, and means we have to seek the salvation of those people who are under our influence for the glory of his name (John 20:21; Hebrews 12:1-2). This is your life's business, occupation, and calling: — *"Follow thou me!"*

Voluntary Subjugation

If we would follow Christ, we must subject everything to his sovereign will. When Peter learned what he must suffer and endure for Christ, he looked at John and said, *"And what shall this man do?"* And the Lord's answer to him was, *"What is that to thee? Follow thou Me!"*

If we would follow Christ, we must not concern ourselves with the responsibilities of others. It is true that we are all members of the body of Christ. And we work and labor together for one cause — the glory of God. All God's people together preach his Word, feed his sheep, and promote his glory. But each individual believer is the Lord's servant. And we must recognize that every man stands or falls before his own Master. We must each be occupied with our own responsibilities, our own ministries, our own calling, and our own faithfulness. We must not concern ourselves with how, when, or where God is pleased to use others. We gladly help others as they serve Christ (missionaries, churches, pastors, etc.). But we must not seek to govern others in their service for Christ. We leave them in the hands of God. And we must not allow ourselves to be turned aside by others from our own responsibilities.

I am not responsible for what God has called you to do. But I am responsible for what he has called me to do. What God does with you is his business. What you do for God is your business and his, not mine. What I do for God is my business and his, not yours (Romans 14:4). May God give us grace to cease being busybodies about other people's business (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:14-16).

If we would follow Christ, we must not concern ourselves with foolish and unlearned questions (2 Timothy 2:22-24). And if we would follow Christ, we must not concern ourselves with our own personal interests, needs, or relations. We must lose our life if we would save it. I must follow Christ whether my family follows him or not. I must follow Christ regardless of personal preference. I must follow Christ regardless of personal costs. And I must do so willingly (2 Timothy 2:8-10).

Most Reasonable

It is most reasonable that we should confine ourselves to this one life-long occupation — *"Follow thou me!"* — I know that I am calling for costly commitment, commitment that requires of us many things contrary to the flesh, things that are often misunderstood and misrepresented by people around us. I am calling for you and me to give ourselves in unreserved, voluntary, whole-hearted commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel of his grace. Our Master says to you and me, *"Follow thou me."* And his command is most reasonable.

- He bought us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). — Shall we take that which belongs to Christ and waste it upon vanity?
- Our powers are so limited. — I know some of my own limitations. I would like to use what little ability and the brief time God has given me in the work of following Christ, preaching the Gospel, and seeking to bring others to know, trust, worship, and follow him.
- Our time is so limited! — *"The time is short"* (1 Corinthians 7:29). Let us therefore redeem the time we have (Ephesians 5:16) and use it wisely, following Christ!

My brother, my sister, do not allow anyone to divert you from the straight path of obedience to Christ. To that, above everything else, we have been called. How I pray that we might, each of us, live to glorify God, that we might each be like an arrow shot from Christ's bow, by his own pierced hand, to the target of God's glory. Let nothing turn us aside from the path of obedience.

I wonder what God would have us to do, individually and collectively, as members of the Church and Kingdom of God in this day. I wonder what God might do with us, if we will but obey his command and follow Christ. What does he yet have for us to do for Christ? What will he yet do with us in the service of his Kingdom?

If you are God's, you are all free men and women, free born children of God, I will not prescribe for you what to do. I simply call upon you to obey the direction of God the Holy Ghost and follow Christ. Perhaps, as you read these lines, you are thinking, "What can I do?" You are Christ's witness; so tell sinners about him. Use your time and money and ability to further the Gospel. Tell perishing sinners around you what wondrous things God has done for you and in you by his grace. Make it your business to minister to, to serve, God's children in this world.

Do everything you can to help one another along the way; but do not set in judgment over, or try to manipulate one another. What another does or does not do is absolutely none of your business or mine. Regarding all such matters, the Lord Jesus says to us, — "*What is that to thee? Follow thou me!*"

- Follow Christ. — This is the command of the Gospel.
- Follow Christ. — This is the life of faith.
- If we do follow Christ now by faith, soon we will follow him home to heaven (John 13:36).

Chapter 132 “Other Things”

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (John 21:25)

This is John’s inspired concluding statement to his Gospel narrative. This is the very last thing God the Holy Ghost inspired his servant to pen about the earthly history of our Lord Jesus Christ. What are these “*other things*” our Lord Jesus did while he walked on this earth, of which we are told nothing in the Book of God? Why are we not told about them? Why are we told about so many things, but not about these “*other things*?”

Certainly these “*other things*” do not refer to our Savior’s doctrine, which is fully revealed in Holy Scriptures, which are able to make chosen, redeemed sinners wise unto salvation. But there were many things done by our Savior which are not written in the Book of God. Much about his childhood, his family, and his manhood are simply and wisely unrevealed. And there were certainly many “*other things*” done by our Lord which God the Holy Ghost chose not to have the inspired writers record, things Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John omitted from the Four Gospels: sermons and prayers, conversations he had with his disciples and others on different occasions, and other signs and wonders, and miraculous operations which were done by him.

World Cannot Receive

Had all that our Savior did been written out on paper, with all the details relating to them explained, John says, “*I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*” That is quite a statement. — “*I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*”

Perhaps John is referring to the fact that the world cannot receive the things of God. God has wisely given us the record of our Redeemer’s incarnation, life, ministry, and doctrine in his Word, which may be read with ease and delight. Here we are given everything relevant to the whole of Christianity and all that is needful to be known for the salvation of our souls.

- Christ’s Eternal Deity
- Christ’s Incarnation
- His Miracles
- His Doctrine
- His Righteous Obedience
- His Vicarious Sufferings
- His Substitutionary Death
- His Triumphant Resurrection
- His Ascension into Heaven
- His Glorious Exaltation
- His Sovereign Reign
- His Heavenly Intercession
- His Glorious Second Advent

These things cannot and will not be understood by the world. The natural man cannot receive them, and will not bear them. Rather, the world rejects and despises them. The Gospel of God is foolishness to the world.

John’s words in this passage are not a hyperbole. In addition to these wonders of mercy, love, and grace accomplished by God our Savior, John began his Gospel by telling us that “*All things were made by him.*” If one were to attempt to even summarize all God’s works of creation and providence, the world itself could not contain the resulting volumes!

Other Things

But what about those “*other things*?” Let’s go back to John 20:30-31 and see what God the Holy Ghost would have us learn by the omission of so many, many “*other things*” from the Book of God. Why did he leave so many things out of this Book that might easily have been included in it? Why are so many, many “*other things*” omitted and only very specific, wondrous things revealed? John 20:30-31 tells us.

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

The Word of God was written that we might believe that “*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,*” and that “*believing we might have life through his name.*”

The Design of Holy Scripture

First, John tells us plainly that the purpose, the design, the intention of Holy Scripture is that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Holy Scripture is not the mother of doubt, but of faith. The Book of God was written to give us confidence toward God by revealing a sure, indisputable line of fact and truth regarding the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. — *“Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ.”* — Obviously, John is referring specifically to the person and work of our Savior as recorded by himself and the other Gospel writers. But that which John tells us here is equally true of the entire volume of Holy Scripture.

Luke 24

Read Luke 24:13-35. That which is here revealed is so precious, so sweet, so heavenly that it hardly needs explanation. Indeed, it cannot be explained to any who have not experienced it for themselves. As they walked together, our Lord Jesus opened the Scriptures to his two disciples. — *“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”* Robert Hawker, commenting on those words, wrote, “Hence we are taught, as plain as words can make it, that the whole body of Scripture is concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Pearl of great price in this Field of his Divine Revelation. As he drew near these two disciples in the way, may he draw near to us every time we open the Book of God. As he opened to them the Scriptures, may he open the Scriptures to us by his Spirit. As his presence and his doctrine caused their hearts to burn within them, oh, may he cause our hearts to burn within us when we read and study the Sacred Volume.

The fact is we have read the Bible with no profit to our souls and no understanding of its message until we realize that the message of Holy Scripture is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Bible is the revelation of Christ.

I fully agree with Martin Luther, who wrote, “There is not a word in the Bible which can be understood without reference to the cross...As we go to the cradle only in order to find the baby, so we go to the Scriptures only to find Christ.”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne, who lived long before anyone dreamed of electric lights, said to his congregation at Christ’s Church in Dundee, Scotland, “When you are reading a book in a dark room, and find it difficult, you take it to a window to get more light. So take your Bible to Christ.”

Christ is the scope of Scripture, the sum and substance of Divine Revelation. Take Christ out of this Book and all that is left is processed wood, with gilded edges, wrapped in leather covers.

One Message

The Bible is a Book about the Lord Jesus Christ. How I wish I could get every man who claims to be a preacher to see this! With regard to the Book of God, Christ is *“the key of knowledge.”* Without the key, men can never unlock the Chest and discover its riches. — They just fumble. The Bible is not a book about science, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about morality, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about history, politics, philosophy, or law. It is not even a book about prophecy, church dogma, or theology. This is a HIM-BOOK. It is all about HIM, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough just to preach the Book, we are sent of God to preach the message of the Book, and the message of this Book is Jesus Christ and him crucified. There is not a page in this Book that does not speak of Christ, not a page!

The Son of God tells us plainly that he is the message and theme of Holy Scripture, that he is the living Word of whom the written Word speaks. He said, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39). — *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:27, 44-47).

The Apostle Paul shows us that the preaching of Christ is synonymous with preaching all the counsel of God, for Christ is all the counsel of God. In Acts 20:26-27 he said, to the Ephesian elders, *“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”* In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he wrote, to the Church at Corinth, *“I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”* In both

places, he is telling us the same thing. Christ and him crucified is all the counsel of God, for all that God almighty has purposed, decreed, revealed, and given to the sons of Adam is in Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Bible, the Word of God, is a Book with one message; and that one message is redemption, righteousness, and eternal life in Christ.

The Word of God is preached only when the Gospel of Christ is preached (1 Peter 1:23-25). All the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ, point us to Christ, and call us to faith in Christ (Genesis 3:15; 22:13-14; 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Job 19; Psalms 2:7-8; 24; 45:6-7; 110:3; Proverbs 8:22-23; Song of Solomon; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:10; Malachi 3:1). In addition to the direct prophecies about the coming of Christ, God gave numerous types and pictures to foreshadow his coming (Typical People — Typical Events — Typical Things — Typical Places — Typical Laws, and Ceremonies, and Sabbath Days (Colossians 2:16-17). The doctrine and message of the entire New Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ. The ordinances of worship prescribed in the New Testament are designed to focus our hearts upon Christ. It is the preacher's business to preach Christ. The American Puritan, Cotton Mather, instructed his students with these wise and needful words of counsel...

“Among all the subjects with which you feed the people of God, I beseech you, let not the true Bread of Life be forgotten; but exhibit as much as you can of the glorious Christ unto them; yea, let the motto upon your whole ministry be, *‘Christ is all!’*”

What a blessing it would be if every man who claims to speak for God, who claims to be a Gospel preacher, would heed those words! How blessed the church of God would be if those who fill her pulpits were determined to preach and teach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified!

That was Paul's determination (1 Corinthians 2:2). It ought to be every preacher's! Any man who is sent of God to preach is sent of God to preach Christ crucified, always, in all places, in all his fulness (1 Corinthians 1:17-25). Christ crucified is *“all the counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27).

He is the singular subject of Holy Scripture. He is the sum and essence of all true doctrine. He is the life of Gospel ordinances. He is the secret ingredient of all true worship. He is the mercy-seat in whom God meets with men. He is the motive of all godliness, obedience, service, and devotion. He is the reward of heavenly glory. Jesus Christ is our God! Jesus Christ is our Savior. And Jesus Christ is salvation. He is the Way to heaven; and he is Heaven. He is the Revealer of truth; and he is Truth. He is the Giver of Life; and he is Life.

The Word of God might be compared to that alabaster box that was brought into Simon's house in Bethany (Mark 14:1-9) containing *“ointment of spikenard very precious.”* When the box was broken and the ointment poured out, the sweet fragrance filled the room. Gospel preachers are like the woman who brought the box and broke it open. They come to the house of God with the Word of God, break it open, and as they expound the Scriptures, the sweet fragrance of Christ crucified fills the house. In the Book of God *“Christ is all!”*

When we talk about divine sovereignty, we are declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord. When we proclaim God's glorious work of predestination, we are showing how that sinners have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. God's election is his choice of some to everlasting salvation in Christ and for Christ's sake. Total depravity, a thoroughly biblical doctrine, is God's revelation of our need of Christ. Limited atonement is the biblical assurance of effectual redemption and grace by Christ, the declaration that all for whom Christ died shall be saved. Irresistible grace, or effectual calling, is the almighty, irresistible revelation of Christ in the soul by God the Holy Spirit, which causes the chosen to come to him. Regeneration is the implanting of Christ in us. Justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all his redeemed. Faith is trusting Christ. Sanctification is Christ being formed in us, begun in regeneration and consummated in glorification. Perseverance is Christ holding our hearts by grace and keeping us in life and faith. Baptism is the believer's public confession of faith in Christ. Being symbolically buried in the watery grave and raised with him, we confess our faith in his finished work of redemption as our Substitute. The Lord's Supper is our blessed remembrance of Christ. Eternal life is knowing Christ. Heaven is being with Christ and like Christ, perfectly and forever. Preaching is telling people about Christ. Anything else is not preaching. Call it what you may; but it is not preaching!

Let Christ be preached, exalted in all his saving grace and glory, in the power of God the Holy Spirit, and God's elect will leave the House of God saying, as the two disciples in Luke 24, — *“Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”*

Beginning at Genesis and going right through the Book of Revelation, God the Holy Ghost tells us, — *“These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”* The Bible is a wonderful library of 66 books. Yet, there is such a

unity about it that it is one Book, with one message. And this one Book has but one design. The whole Book of God, and every portion of it, was “*written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*”

What a lesson this is for all who write or speak for God! Let us labor for this one thing, that we may lead immortal souls to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. — God give me grace to preach and write to bring you to Christ, not to promote a creed, not to build a denomination, not to maintain a history, not to promote myself, but “*that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” The Book of God was not written that we might know all about Christ, but that we might know Christ, that we might “*believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!*”

The Object of Saving Faith

I have deliberately used the bulk of this final study in John’s Gospel showing you that the purpose, the design, the intention of Holy Scripture is that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Now, in the *second* place, let me briefly show you the singular object of saving faith. — Faith is believing Christ. The singular object of saving faith is Christ. — What does that mean? Sadly, I fear that very few know the answer. But John gives us the answer. — To believe Christ is to believe that “*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*” (1 John 2:22; 5:1). Faith in Christ involves believing “*that Jesus is the Christ,*” to believe that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, actually, effectually accomplished all that the prophets of the Old Testament said Christ would accomplish (Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:24).

C .H. Spurgeon once passed by a known church building where the Gospel of Christ was denied and mocked, but never preached. This sign out front announced the title of the message for that week — “Crucifixion.”

Though “crucifixion” and “crucifiction” sound the same when pronounced, there is a vast difference between the two. The religious world of our day has not shifted much in its opinion about what really happened at Calvary. While some deny the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Calvary, nearly all in our day deny what he accomplished. The majority of the preaching that goes on today denies the effectual redemption and salvation accomplished by Christ’s blood sacrifice and righteousness obedience (Philippians 2:7-9; Hebrews 2:17; 9:12). When you preach that his blood was shed for all humanity without exception, but it never really secured and accomplished salvation for anyone, you are preaching “crucifiction.”

Thank God that the Scriptures do not teach “crucifiction.” The Scriptures plainly teach us the glorious and successful work our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for his people on the cross (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 9:12). His crucifixion means sin is atoned (1 John 4:10), justice is satisfied (Galatians 3:13), the law of God is honored (Isaiah 42:21), everlasting righteousness is established and brought in (Romans 5:19-21; Philippians 3:9), salvation accomplished (John 17:4; 19:30), God’s elect ransomed (Acts 20:28). That is why the apostle Paul was determined to know, rejoice in, and preach nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). This is also why he refused to glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

Do you believe in “crucifixion” or “crucifiction?” The difference is eternal life in Christ Jesus, or the just condemnation in Adam (Romans 5:19). If Christ did not effectually put away sin (Hebrews 9:26) and accomplish salvation (John 17:4; 19:30), your hope of redemption is mere fiction and utterly false, not reality and truth (Galatians 2:20-21; 1 John 5:21).

The Connection of Life with Faith

Third, John shows us the connection of life with faith.

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

May God the Holy Spirit be pleased to seal the message of this Book to your heart, causing you to “*believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*” Faith in Christ does not give you eternal life. The gift of life eternal brings with it all the fulness of grace by God the Holy Spirit, who works faith in us, causing us to believe. And you will never have eternal life, if you do not trust Christ. But, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, eternal life is yours, you have eternal life. — “*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).

Amen.