

# A Commentary on the Gospel of John

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## Preface

It is usual for commentaries to begin with detailed information about the source of the book under consideration. This includes its probable date, authorship, purpose and a review of critical evidence by scholars in the past. My approach is not that of a scholar - it cannot be, for I am not one. However, surely the purpose of this Gospel is to bring ordinary people to an understanding of who Jesus is and, by understanding, to find life. The writer says as much But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:31). I am such a person.

I am aware that there are various opinions as to who the author was; for myself I am happy to accept that it was the apostle John, even if someone else actually wrote it down (John the Elder?), although in the final analysis that is not so very important. It is the truth conveyed which is vital. I believe that as a young man, John was one of those chosen to be with Jesus. He watched, and he participated in, the life of Jesus for some three years. After this, as time went by and the work of Christ continued, John wrestled in his mind with the meaning of all that he had seen and heard and he came to understand the truth which, as an old man, he has set down here. My aim is simply to dig into that writing (which I believe was inspired by the Holy Spirit) to draw from it (by the inspiration of that same Spirit) the truth which John came to know.

It may well be that the Gospel which appears fourth in the Bible was also the fourth to be written. John would be aware that the events of the life of Jesus had already been told but he was concerned that their spiritual significance had not been grasped. In setting down his understanding for the benefit of others, he would know that by the time he wrote, the great majority of believers were Gentiles, not Jews. Indeed it is commonly accepted that the Gospel was written at Ephesus, a centre of Greek culture. To refer to Jewish history as recorded in the Old Testament would be meaningless for most believers and the significance of the expected Messiah would be lost on them. But, for John, Jesus was not simply the revelation of the God of the Jews, he was the expression of the source which lies behind all life everywhere; and to explain this he had to find words acceptable to Greeks as well as Jews.

However, Jesus is too big to be confined within words, even those of Holy Scripture. No words, however inspired, can convey the total ultimate source; they are like sacraments which convey a reality beyond themselves. It is the reality behind them which I seek to discover. I feel a bonding with John as though he were alive today; as we relate to each other I know he is struggling not only because he is aware that he has not yet fully comprehended the God he has seen in Jesus, but because he is finding it difficult to put into words such truth as he has grasped; and it is as though he knows that I am striving to listen and to experience what he is seeking to convey. It is a truth beyond words, yet words are all we have. Our link is the Holy Spirit who condenses that truth into the dry text and then brings it to life again in the spirit of those who long to understand

For whom am I writing? For everyman and for no man. I have in mind the ordinary people amongst whom I have ministered for so many years; but I know that very likely no one else will ever see this. It may remain on a computer disc which will simply be thrown away after my death, and if I do print it out, who will be interested in a personal devotional commentary? It is to help me understand. I am in my seventieth year and I may never finish it - but what a lovely way to go; still seeking to discover more of the Lord I will then see face to face.

## Introduction

In the Bible, although there are statements about God e.g. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power (Nahum 1:3), this is not its main thrust. Rather, it is a record and description of people's experience of God. From this we are able to form our own impressions and make up our own minds of who God is. This is far more effective than relating a whole list of attributes. For instance, I might tell you my father was a good and kind man; you would probably accept that that is how he appeared to me but it would not involve you in having to make any personal response. However, if I told you that he sent me to a fee-paying school (very common in those days and not at all elitist) and, during the war, finance was short; and that I failed my Higher Schools Exam which would entail a further year's fees, and that when I broke the news to him his immediate comment was, "Never mind, old lad, I am sure you did your best," you will be much more involved, and be able to begin to form your own opinion of him.

The Synoptic Gospels are mainly records of what "Jesus began to do and teach" and, although they contain comments of what others thought of him, we are invited to form our own opinion as to who he is. John will adopt the same approach, although his record will be much more selective, but, unlike the others, he begins by making a statement of his own view of Jesus. This is his distilled wisdom; he has come to a conclusion of who Jesus is and he begins his account by sharing that conclusion with his readers in verses 1-18. The rest of his record will be a selection of events in the life of Jesus, which John himself witnessed, to support his claims.

## Commentary

1. The opening words are obviously an echo of the opening of Genesis. That is a very bold thing to do. The Jews revere Scripture, it is holy and sacred, and for John deliberately to open his Gospel in this way is incredibly daring; it could be regarded as a claim that his writings are to have equal authority. In fact, of course, to Christians they have, but John could not have known that.

What does he mean by, 'The Beginning'? Genesis, of course, relates the term to the creation and John is doing the same, but he is making the point that Jesus, the Word, already existed, he was. If God created, everything then there must have been when God existed but creation did not. (I am deliberately avoiding saying, "a time when God existed," because it may well be that 'time' is part of creation.) The possibility then arises that perhaps God existed alone and first he 'created' the Son (and the Holy Spirit) who only then existed and could be involved in creating everything else after that. The Christian belief, however, is that there never was when the Son was not. The creed seeks to preserve this truth by saying that the Son was 'begotten' not created, whatever we understand by that; together with the Holy Spirit, he is part of the eternal 'I AM'. Were this not so there would be a doctrinal inadequacy. We believe that "God is love", but if he existed alone then there would be no one for him to love, he would need someone to love; and if God ever needed anything then, until that need was met, he would be imperfect, incomplete. The doctrine of the Trinity, although it was not invented to avoid that dilemma, preserves the truth of God being all- (and self-) sufficient. The Godhead created, not because they needed to do so but because the love generated within their unity and which always existed because it was part of the divine esse, overflowed in an act of self-giving. "Let us create something (someone) in our own image" i.e. to love and to be loved. A truth which the Letter to the Ephesians explains was "in accordance with his pleasure and will" or "because he wanted to" (The Living Bible) (Eph. 1:5)

So, by referring to 'the beginning', John is going behind the creation to refer to the state which always existed. It is difficult for our minds to comprehend eternity because we have known only time. For us, everything must have a start; there must be a first cause. When a child asks, "Who made God?" that is the beginning of a chain which would go on infinitely - "Then who made, who made, who made...." When we have made the jump to, "Then what originally was?" we have to change the question, because we are dealing with eternity, to, "What originally is?" and answer, "That is what we mean by 'God,'" and make yet a further change from 'what' to 'who'. Incidentally, this understanding reveals the wonder of the self-revelation of God to Moses as the I AM; for that embraces both personality and eternity.

John calls Jesus 'The Word'; 'Logos'. Had he referred to Jesus as the Messiah, that would have meant nothing to the great majority of believers who, by now, were Gentiles greatly outnumbering the Jews, and it would have been a hindrance in evangelising the world. But both Gentiles and Jews were aware of the term Logos. To the Greeks with their emphasis on logic and the mind, it meant 'reason' - the wisdom which lay behind creation. To the Jew it meant the word. In Jewish thought and history, a word, especially the word of God, was very important. It carried power. The world and everything in it was brought into being when God spoke it into being; God said and it happened. "...My word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you." (Joshua 23:14 A.V.) The Hebrew word translated 'thing' is *dabar* which is translated in many different ways but usually as 'thing' (215 times) or 'word' (770 times). The two are indistinguishable; God spoke it and the thing happened. So, by using the term Logos, John can speak meaningfully to both Gentiles and Jews. However, whilst it was important for John to have in mind who his readers or listeners were - the people he was trying to reach; it is equally important for us to understand what it was that John was seeking to convey.

What is a word? it is a means of self expression. Of course, it is not the only means; we express ourselves in what we do, in what we make: but perhaps the most immediately effective means of expressing ourselves is in words. So the Logos is the self expression of God. J.B. Phillips actually translates this verse, "At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God..." God is always active, always giving of himself; working to bring everything to perfection and wholeness; restoring and redeeming; "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3) i.e. the expression of his power through Christ. What John is seeking to convey is that Jesus is the clearest revelation of the unseen source and sustainer of all creation.

He goes further, not only has this Word always existed, he has existed alongside God; more yet, he is himself God, part of the Godhead. Scholars point out that John does not use the definite article in describing the Word as being God, which would be the normal custom in using a noun. It would be going too far to say that it is, therefore, an adjective - 'godlike' or 'godly'. Nevertheless, he does imply a differentiation. The Word has an individual identity; it is not indistinguishable from another godly being who, in the Jewish understanding, is *Jahweh*, because the Word was with God. Here we are faced with the mystery of the Trinity. Perhaps a helpful way of thinking of this is to picture a particular choir. How many choirs are there? One! How many people in the choir? Many! Are they all singing the same notes? No, there are probably at least four parts, soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Are they all singing the same piece of music? Yes, they harmonise perfectly. There is only one God, but there are three personalities who are interdependent. They have a common mind, will and purpose and all are involved in executing that common purpose; each with a different task or application but working in perfect harmony.

2. So John is preparing us for the truth that Jesus is the most complete and perfect expression or revelation given to mankind of who and what God is. He will reach the culmination of this truth at the end of Christ's life when the Lord tells Philip, that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (14:9). Of course, John has not yet stated or implied that by speaking of the 'Word' he is referring to Jesus. He does not specifically refer to the Logos as 'he' as most English translations do in this verse. In Greek the pronoun can be either masculine or neuter, so at this early stage of his argument John does not have to reveal he is speaking of a personality. It is not until v.14 that he states that the Word became a human being and lived on earth among us and so reveals that he is speaking of Jesus. At the moment he simply explains that the Logos was part of the ultimate reality which is the source and cause of all creation which is what we mean by the term 'God'. 'It' was both part of that reality, yet separate.

3. One of the greatest problems in any religious philosophy is to account for the presence of evil; where did it come from? Why is there so much violence in nature? Different faiths seek to deal with this problem in various ways. Some would hold that there are two, possibly equal, powers or gods; one good and one evil. Hence the constant battle between the two. Others would separate their god or gods from physical matter, claiming that matter is intrinsically evil. John adopts the teaching of Genesis in which, as a Jew, he had been

steeped. There is only one God and he is responsible for creating everything, and everything he created was good. This immediately throws the problem of evil into stark relief. Genesis explains the reason for evil early on: God gave man free will to obey or disobey his Creator. Man chose to disobey and in doing so he fundamentally upset not only the relationship between himself and God but by that act threw the whole of creation out of kilter. Originally all animals, and man himself, were vegetarian. What is more, the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the time when that would be restored:

"The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain," says the Lord.  
(Isaiah 65:25)

John was fully aware of what he was doing because he is about to refer to the fact that there is evil in the world (he calls it 'darkness'). The whole of his gospel is given over to the conflict between good and evil, (darkness and light) and the way in which God has resolved this conflict in the person of Jesus, the Word of God; but he does not develop that at the moment, nor does he explain the origin of evil. He reiterates the teaching of Genesis but sets the Word within that context by stating that he was involved in the act of creation. Everything that is comes from one source - God; and the Word was the instrument through which (whom) the will of God to create was expressed and effected. Having stated this truth positively John makes it doubly sure by setting out the negative; nothing exists which did not come into being through the Word.

When did it really dawn on John just who Jesus is? He records that the Lord said, "Before Abraham was born, I am." (8:59) But surely he did not understand the full import of that at the time. What a shock it must have been later, after Jesus had been taken up into heaven, to realise that the person with whom he had walked and talked, laughed and cried, was the Creator of the universe!

4. John now adds another truth. Life was in the Word. Later he will quote the actual words of Jesus, "As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." (5:26) This is saying more than that creation came into being through the Word, which could mean no more than that the Word was the channel. Life not only flowed through the Word, it was part of the attribute of what the Word is in itself. Here, of course, John is not thinking simply of existence, he is speaking of that eternal quality of life which God is (rather than has). It is important to realise that no human being has that life within him or her automatically. In Scriptural terms, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden before they had eaten of the tree of life. Something else needs to happen before we can receive that eternal life; but Jesus had that life within himself.

In these opening verses, John is not simply echoing the opening of Genesis, he is reinterpreting it. "The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep." (Gen. 1:2) Darkness was primal chaos. The first expression of God towards this chaos was, "Let there be light," and, because the expression of God's will depicted as a word is virtually identical with the thing actually happening (see note on v.1. "The Word"), "there was light." (Gen. 1:3) John sees the world still lying in darkness but the Light of the expression of God, the Word, pierces it.

This raises the question of whether Creation is progressing in an unbroken line of God gradually bringing order out of the original chaos; or whether there was a stage where perfect order was created but that order was disrupted by something (man's disobedience) which thrust it back into darkness. Scripture points to something between these alternatives. When God rested from creating, he saw that everything was "very good." (Gen. 1:31) so there was nothing evil or sinful in it. However, creation was not perfect in the sense that it had not been brought to completion; it still needed to be populated and subdued. Man was given that task - "fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen. 1:28) The intention was that by the willingness of man to obey and the power of the Spirit of God within him, God's plan should be brought to completion. But man did not obey and that, as we have seen, threw the whole of creation out of kilter.

It is a mystery why man, who knew only good, should desire to disobey. Scripture states that it was because he was tempted by the devil, but that only pushes the problem back a stage. Why should the devil, who was

also originally good and an angel of light, desire to disobey? What we do know, however, is that sin did enter the world. Creation still retains much of the handiwork of its Creator. There is so much beauty and goodness within it; but also there is chaos; things do not operate as God intended that they should. Two of the great themes of John's gospel are Life and Light, both of which he introduces in this verse. Satan, the devil, is the Prince of this world and therefore it lies in darkness. But the word of God, both the word revealed through the prophets of the Old Testament and the personal Word of which John speaks, brings light for mankind.

5. If the purpose and way of the Creator is unknown then there can be no understanding of what life is for and how it should be lived; everyone is left to do what is right (or wrong) in his own eyes or in the eyes of whoever dominates him. 'Darkness' is an apt term to describe that state. The light which John is speaking about springs from the self-expression of God who is constantly at work restoring, redeeming and making whole, bringing in his will. Therefore, it is continually piercing the darkness of unbelief and ignorance. In English there is no word which exactly translates the verb which John uses here, although 'apprehend' gets close to it. To apprehend can mean to grasp or understand a truth; it can also mean to arrest or seize a criminal. Colloquially, we may say of something someone tells us, "I cannot swallow that," meaning we cannot believe or accept it; but if we swallow something up we consume it. So, the Greek word may be translated either as the darkness not understanding the light or the darkness not overcoming or extinguishing it. Most modern versions, whichever alternative they adopt, include a footnote giving the other meaning. We need both aspects. A person who does not believe in God obviously cannot know or understand his ways; but that ignorance and the chaos and evil it produces (and remember that Scripture indicates this has affected the whole of creation) cannot overwhelm the continuous self expression of the eternal Creator.

6. Why does John introduce John the Baptist at this point? One reason may be that he himself was originally a disciple of the Baptist, who pointed him to Jesus; so he was speaking from personal experience. More important, however, is the fact that until now he has been giving his own understanding of who Jesus is. A critic might raise the objection, "These are only your personal views." John points to the testimony of John the Baptist - a man sent from God to bear witness to the light. Although the light has always been shining John now puts a date in history when the light is revealed in a special manner. It will not be until v.10 that the Word is revealed as a human being, but John is preparing the way for that statement, by pointing to the witness of the Baptist who was regarded as a prophet.

7-8. John is very careful how he describes John the Baptist. He was a man, nothing more, sent to witness to the light. Admittedly, by now, the majority of believers were not Jews but Gentiles and so John the Baptist's testimony might not carry the same weight as it would do for those who were more aware of the impact he had made in Israel. However, there is a strong tradition that John the Apostle was closely associated with Ephesus and, whilst we must not read too much into it, it is interesting that Acts chapter 19 records that when Paul first came to Ephesus he found some disciples who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit and who explained that they had received only John's baptism. So certainly he was known there. It may be that quite a cult had developed regarding him. So John, our author, is careful to stress that the Baptist was not the light but came to witness to it. So, John wants to use the authority that the Baptist gives to his assertions about the Word but, at the same time, he ensures that his readers understand that the Baptist was only a man and is not to be worshipped.

There is a disagreement amongst commentators as to the meaning of the words, "that through him all men might believe." Who is the 'him'? John the Baptist or Jesus the Word? Surely it must be the Baptist. We are to believe in Jesus, as John makes clear only 5 verses later (12), not through him; but because the Baptist was the witness to the light, men are to believe in Jesus through his testimony.

9. Usually Scripture uses the terms 'truth' and 'true' to mean what is real. John has spoken of only one light - the light of ultimate reality; he has not contrasted it with any false light. It is interesting that Genesis is ambivalent about this light. The first word of the Creator was "Let there be light": there was, and he called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night'. Yet the sun, which creates the light which we term 'day', was not

created until the fourth day. The author of Genesis was obviously no fool and he would be aware of this anomaly; he is seeking to convey a truth beyond literal interpretation. Perhaps it is the same underlying truth which the writer of Revelation understood when he wrote, "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord will give them light." (Rev. 22:5) It is this light proceeding from God himself which John is talking about here.

There are alternative readings of this verse. Does the light give light to every man who comes into the world, or is it that the light which gives light to every man was coming into the world? Most modern versions put the latter as the preferable meaning, certainly this fits better with the following verse. Whichever way we read it, however, it implies that man has never been totally without light (see v.5). The point John is making (taking the preferred reading) is that the light which has always been there shining in the darkness, was now actually coming into the world in a specific way. John claims that everyone has been afforded at least some degree of eternal light. Obviously those born into a home where Christ is revered will have an advantage over those surrounded by atheists and pagans. Nevertheless, John would hold that no one can claim he should be excused his sin and unbelief because he did not know the truth; he had at least some light. Paul wrote, "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Rom.1:19-20) It seems that John is going even further than Paul; stating that as well as the truth that comes by observing the material universe, every person has some inner revelation of the truth.

We must take John's reasoning further. Because there is only one true light then every truth discovered and embraced by men and women of every faith (and none) is a revelation of that light. That is not to claim that all faiths are the same, nor that all worship the same God, but only that where any faith holds a true principle, then that principle springs from the one light. If that were not so, then we would be asserting that there is some other source of truth than the one God whose greatest revelation of himself is the Word made flesh - Jesus the Christ.

10. At last John uses the word 'he'. The abstract concept of the Word, the Life and the Light is focused and earthed in a person. 'He' was actually in the world. He was its creator so it was his own creation he entered! Nevertheless the world did not recognise its creator. John invites us to ponder the irony of that situation. Perhaps the reason for this failure is that before the light appeared mankind had already decided on its gods. Different cultures invented its different gods and, because the Word did not conform to their preconceived ideas, they failed to recognise him.

Today we have a problem which John would not have known. In his day everyone believed in a god of some sort. Some were more powerful than others and either more or less interested in what was happening to mankind; but there had to be a god to explain the fact of creation. That is no longer so; many doubt that any god exists. The result, of course, is the same - Jesus is not recognised.

11. John now homes in on an even greater irony. The Jews had not been left to invent a god of their choosing; the true God had revealed himself to them as Yahweh, he had formed them into a people for his own possession to be a light to the Gentiles. The light which he is was to shine through them to the world. Now that light had itself (himself) come into the world and even his own people did not recognise him or receive him.

12. However, although the Jewish nation, as a whole, did not accept him for who he is, some individuals did so. In the story he is about to tell John will illustrate this truth time and again: the nation rejects Jesus but individuals here and there receive him; they believe in his name. Today we have lost much of the concept of understanding the power of a name. It still means something when a person says as we set off to meet someone else, "Mention my name," and every salesman knows how helpful it is to be able to ask for or greet a client by name, but in Bible times to know someone's name gave you power over them; you tapped into something of their personality, their essential being. Some rulers even had a secret name that they gave

themselves and revealed to no one else in order to preserve their authority. So to believe in someone's name is to rely on them as a person, to trust the totality of who and what they are.

As he tells the story, John will frequently refer to the teaching of Jesus that he is in the Father and the Father is in him; that we are in him (Jesus) and he is in us. There is something of that two way understanding underlying this verse; we receive him into ourselves and commit ourselves into his care and authority.

To such Jesus has given the right to become children of God. In a general sense, of course, everyone is a child of God in that it is he who has given life to everyone. However, natural birth does not impart that life of which John has spoken (4) and which alone is eternal; a person has to be born again of the Holy Spirit to receive that, as Jesus was to make clear to Nicodemus (Ch. 3). The word 'right' is *exousia* which can also be translated 'power' or 'authority'. It is the word used of Jesus having authority to judge (5:17), of having authority to lay down and take up his life (10:18), of Pilate having the power either to free or to crucify Jesus, and Jesus having authority to give eternal life (17:2). In the current verse the word is linked to the verb 'become', which is strange to our thought form. If the word is translated either as power or authority it makes the statement read as though we are given the authority first and then we use that to become God's children. Can it really mean that? Is it not God who makes us his children when we receive Jesus and believe in him? Perhaps it is this which encouraged the translators of the NIV version to use the word 'right', but that does not solve the problem and confuses the issue as though John were saying, 'the right to be called or known as the children of God'. But that is not what John is saying, he clearly uses the word 'become'.

The solution lies in the fact that John never uses the same Greek word which he reserves for speaking of Jesus as God's son (child) as he uses to speak of us as God's son or child. Jesus is the only begotten Son, who existed before he was born a human being of Mary. When we are born again we are adopted as God's child; we then have to become what we are already accounted. John is here thinking of our sanctification rather than our justification, although he might not wish to make such a clear distinction between the two. We cannot become what we should be, what we were designed to be, in our own power. We need a power beyond ourselves to do that. This is what John is talking about. When we receive Jesus, believe in his name (that is, tap into the essential being which he is), we receive the power which will enable us to become in our being what we are already accounted or adopted to be, the child of God. John is referring to the way we lead and develop our lives from that moment on.

13. This verse has been translated by some commentators in the singular to read "Who was born." This reading relates back to the pronouns 'him' and 'he' in the previous verse i.e. to Jesus. This would then be a clear reference to the virgin birth of Christ who certainly was not born to Mary and Joseph of natural descent, human decision or sexual desire but by the direct intervention of God. However, the best texts have the plural, relating back to those who are the children of God. Nevertheless, William Temple makes a valid point in relating the manner of the virgin birth of Christ to the supernatural rebirth of believers; both are the work of the Holy Spirit. Everyone who is born again is born of the Spirit and this brings him or her into God's family, which is not a matter of natural descent. Whatever part a person's will may play in responding to God, in deciding to receive Christ and believe in his name, the birth into new life is not the result of any human being's will (not of parent, friend nor the person involved) but of God's intervention.

14. The care with which the words of Scripture are chosen become clearer as their significance is understood. This verse is packed with meaning. The Word - all that John has explained he means by that term - became flesh. There is a heresy, which arose very early in the life of the Church, that the Christ came upon a human being known as Jesus (probably at the time of his baptism) and departed from him before his crucifixion. John is clear, the Word did not 'come upon' any existing human being, the Word became flesh!

He tabernacled among us. What a word to use; how much that would conjure up. In the wilderness when the Hebrews underwent all the uncertainties of that time, with no permanent home, open to the heat and the cold, short of food and water, striking and putting up their tents; there, right in the very centre of the camp was God's tabernacle or tent. What clearer indication could there be that God was with them, experiencing all

that they were going through? If their tents might blow down, so might God's. What a wonderful visual aid in preparation for a greater indication of God's identification with his people. The essence of who and what God is took his own human body and lived on earth as a man. Later Paul was to refer to his own human body as a tent (2 Cor. 5: 1 & 4). The word 'tabernacled' also conveys the idea of a temporary structure. Like each of us, Jesus was only to be on this earth for a while; it was no more his permanent abode than it is to be ours.

The word which lies behind 'saw' implies literal physical sight, not a spiritualisation. However, it also carries the sense of looking into or contemplating what is seen. We must not have a stained glass window view of Christ with a halo round his head; it was not that sort of 'glory'. Rather it was a contemplation of the life Jesus led combined with an insight into what glory really is. Perhaps understanding what Scripture means by 'glory' is one of the most difficult tasks of all. In the Old Testament there is reference to the *kabod* of God, referring to 'weight' or reputation. It dwelt in the Holy of Holies. It was said to be in the cloud which guided the Hebrews in the wilderness by day and the pillar of fire by night, and the face of Moses shone after he had been in the presence of the Lord. This clearly implies a form of physical glowing. However, that glow is only the physical manifestation of the essence of the glory. John speaks of something deeper than the outward manifestation, he is looking at the cause of it. Although we speak of the 'attributes of God' (and need to do so for it is difficult to convey what we mean in any other way), in fact he does not have attributes - he is. Thus God does not have love he is love. So he does not have glory he is glory. In speaking of the crucifixion it is said that the sin of the whole world which Jesus was carrying at that moment was so real and so concentrated that it manifested in a physical darkness. The antithesis of this is the glory of God which from time to time breaks through from the spiritual into the material realm. The face of Moses shone when he had been in the presence of God. Christ was transfigured in the presence of three of the disciples on the mountain. However, although John was one of those three, he does not refer to the transfiguration in his gospel. He speaks of the cross as Christ's glorification. To him, whether the glory is manifested physically as a bright glow or not, is not important. The glory is there anyway because God is there and at work. The glory of God is what God is and when he expresses himself then his glory must be revealed, although it may not be visible revelation. God is glory, he is also love; so when he expresses himself he reveals love - self-giving, self-sacrificial love. Nowhere is that self-sacrificial love more clearly demonstrated than on the cross. So, to John, that is an even greater revelation of Christ's glory than what he saw on the mountain. Set out like this, it may seem that John's was a purely intellectual, logical, beholding of Christ's glory. Of course, an understanding of the meaning of Christ's becoming flesh, and of the whole of his life culminating in his death, is involved, but for John it is more than that; the understanding brought a revelation, he saw what it all meant, he saw what Christ (and the Father through him) was doing. That was the manifestation of his glory!

Of course, by no means everyone who met Christ saw that glory. Herod and Pilate did not do so. So John says that "we" beheld his glory. John is to record the words of Jesus that a person cannot see the kingdom of God unless he is born again of the Holy Spirit (3:3); similarly he cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

John inserts a qualifying clause to describe this glory. He says it is the glory of only begotten of Father (i.e. there is no definite article). Commentators differ as to whether this means the authority which any son inherits or is given by his father, or whether it is the glory which the only begotten Son of the one heavenly Father inherits. Whichever is correct, the point John is making is that the glory which is revealed in Jesus does not stop at him, indeed it is not his alone; it points beyond himself to the one who sent him. Everything about Jesus is a revelation of the Father.

The Word made flesh was full of grace and truth. (Surely it was not the glory that was full of grace and truth, but the Word.) As with 'love' and 'glory', grace is not something God has but is. Grace is to God what sunshine is to the sun - an expression of himself. When he acts then his character, his essential being is revealed. We have seen that this is self-sacrificial love. The object of that love does not deserve anything from God; it is not drawn from God by anything in the recipient, it is simply the expression of who and what God is. That is grace: and grace, because it is an emanation of God, is lovely and delightful. Similarly, God is truth. Because everything comes from God, because all creation is an expression of God, the meaning and purpose

behind everything is to be found in God. The reality (that is the truth) of everything lies in God. Jesus is the expression of that reality, so he must be the truth as the Father is the truth.

15. Once again John shows that the Baptist exalted Jesus above himself (cf. vv.7-8). By saying "He who comes after me," does he mean that he was six months older than his cousin or that he had begun his ministry before him? That is unimportant compared with his explanation, "he... has surpassed me because he was before me." This pre-echoes the words of Jesus, "Before Abraham was born, I am." (8:58) The Baptist understands that Jesus has not so much overtaken him as that he always has been superior to him. That does not necessarily imply that he understood that Jesus actually had an existence as a person before he did. It may mean only that the Baptist knew that one was to come to be the Messiah. The role was preordained and so, whoever it turned out to be, in that sense that person was before him. He knew that he was not the Messiah, only the voice to proclaim him

16. John has already referred to the grace of God revealed in Jesus (15). Now he says that we have all received grace from Christ's fullness. There is a certain clumsiness here in the English translation because there are nuances of thought in different cultures which cannot be adequately conveyed from one language to another. Because the Word was not only with God but was and is God, he is all that God is. Of course, a human body imposes certain limitations on the expression of that fullness, but the fullness is there nonetheless (Col. 1:19). We have all been blessed in some way by that expression of God through Jesus. Many modern versions state "grace upon grace" but literally the translation is "grace instead of grace". It seems that what John seeks to convey is that because God is who he is he continually pours himself out for and upon us. We receive of him and before we have used up what he has given us of himself, he gives us more which is even more wonderful than what we have already received. As the Christian walks with God, he discovers more and more wonders about him and his creation. The higher we struggle up the hill, the more breathtaking the view.

17. This growing understanding of God brings a wonderful freedom. A child has to be disciplined and, for its own good, must obey even when he or she does not understand the reason for an order. As they grow up they will comprehend more and will be able to make their own decisions. It isn't that the 'law' was wrong, it was a helpful restriction to prevent them going astray, but the law is inflexible and cannot allow for different circumstances. So with God's laws, they are good, but not as good as knowing God as he is in himself, and his ways. So, says John, Moses received the law from God and gave it to the people of Israel. It had served them well but law is, of necessity, restrictive; it sets boundaries, even if it allows great freedom within those boundaries. Jesus Christ brought the revelation of God himself which is both grace and truth (cf. note on v.14). This brings a freedom the law cannot give because it reveals the reason for the law and when we understand that we do not need it. (Of course, this is to ignore the practicalities; we can so easily fall into sin. We may now know what is right but we may well fail to do it. However, John is speaking of the ideal, the possibilities which have been opened by Jesus.) John is to return to this thought of freedom as he recounts the story of Jesus.

However, there is an even more important difference between law and grace. The law may correctly indicate the way to live but it gives no power to keep to it. Grace, because it is the self giving of God, provides his power and strength to enable us to follow, not the law but the way we are able to see for ourselves is the true and only way. Later John will quote the words of Jesus that he is the way, and that if we abide in him as a branch abides in the vine, his life will flow through us. The law, great as it may be, can never provide that.

At last John has revealed who he is talking about. In this commentary I have had to jump ahead of him and use the name of Jesus for ease of discussion. Only now does he state that the Word, the Light, the Life, full of grace and truth, the one to whom John the Baptist bore witness, is Jesus Christ. Probably most of us were already believers when we first read John's gospel; we had been told already that the Word was Jesus; so we missed the dramatic effect John has built up in saying so much about this revelation of God before announcing who it is he is speaking about.

18. It is said of Moses that he spoke with God "face to face". Yet here John claims that no one has ever seen God. An old commentary observes that such statements "do not deny the possibility of a true knowledge of

God, but of a natural knowledge of God such as can be described as 'sight'." That is to say, God does not dwell in the physical, material time and space in which we live at present. He is altogether other. He does not have a body with arms and legs, nor a face. He is everywhere and in everything. However, we must avoid an animist approach which would mean that if we destroy a flower, a rock or anything that exists, we reduce the 'size' of God because a little part of him has been destroyed. In the Old Testament God 'appeared' to a very limited number of people, but that was a manifestation of him which in his graciousness assured mankind that he was not simply a thought or an abstract idea. God is a being but he exists in a form which our finite minds cannot assimilate, so he reveals himself in ways we can assimilate; but that is not the fullness of his essence, only a manifestation of it.

A corollary to this is that his environment and his person are holy. That holiness is so powerful that no sin nor anything tainted by sin could exist in its naked presence. The term 'face to face' describing Moses's relationship with God, does not refer to a physical viewing of God; nevertheless, the reality of the encounter was such that it had a physical consequence in that his face shone.

Because God is so 'other' than us and cannot reveal himself as he actually is in a time/space environment, no one can imagine what he 'looks' like. However, the man Jesus was sinless and was so open to God that he was the perfect expression of God in human form. Although God is so much more than can be expressed in any human form, the whole of who and what God is was 'in' Jesus. It is an inadequate analogy but imagine a Beethoven symphony being played on a piano. It may be the whole symphony in the sense that every note played by all the different instruments is included, but having only the one instrument is restrictive; it can never express all that Beethoven conceived for the full orchestra. So, all that God is was expressed through the severe limitation of a human body.

Once again we are faced with the difficulty of the term "only begotten" (cf. 14). Whatever detail John is seeking to express by this term he is obviously referring to Jesus who is "in (or into) the bosom of the Father". We are not meant to seek a literal interpretation of this description. John is seeking to convey the most intimate relationship between the Father and the Son to show that the latter as the Word made flesh, is the most perfect vehicle or vessel to reveal of who God is. In referring to the bosom of the Father, he is not speaking of a place but a state of relationship.

We have already seen that the term 'only begotten' in vv. 14 & 18 is difficult to translate. Obviously, with hindsight, we can see that John is referring to Jesus as the Son of God. However, he has not actually used the word 'Son', nor has he used the word 'Father'. There are occasions in the Old Testament when God is revealed as a Father; for instance in Hosea we have God saying, "It was I who taught Ephraim to walk" (11:3). But these instances are rare and certainly do not convey the meaning of the term as used by John and others in the New Testament. It is right that we preserve a sense of awe towards God. Perhaps today we do not stress sufficiently the fact of judgement which all must face; but the old idea of God as a great policeman in the sky, waiting to pounce on our every mistake, has, on the whole, been replaced by that of a loving Father, seeking the very best for us. For myself, I find that when I sin, I am not so much concerned about suffering some dreadful punishment in the future as the pain of having to live with myself now, knowing that I have hurt God by failing to be the person he is proud of and desires me to be. I realise that Jesus has brought me into a relationship; that is what he came to do and I am desperately unhappy when that relationship is damaged or in danger of being destroyed and when that happens it is always my fault and that makes it even more difficult to bear. It is the possibility of this relationship which John has opened up in using the words, 'The Father'.

## The Narrative

19-20. John has completed his introduction and now turns to presenting a selective history of the life of Jesus. Unlike Luke and Matthew, he gives no human genealogy of Jesus; he has given a heavenly or spiritual one which he regards as far more important than any human ancestry. Like Mark, he begins with the start of the ministry of Jesus - although in John's record the baptism of Jesus has already taken place. He has already referred to the Baptist and his witness to Christ, he now sets it in its context.

As the story develops 'the Jews' will emerge as the opposition. Here, however, they are simply doing their duty. As the son of a priest, John is himself a priest, yet the religious authorities in Jerusalem have received a report that he is baptising Jews. Why? Proselytes needed to be baptised but not those who are born into the race of the chosen people. So they (presumably the Sanhedrin) sent some representatives to find out what was going on because it was their duty to maintain the Jewish faith and put down heresy. At first John mentions only priests and Levites in the delegation, who ask the Baptist who he is. John does not give details of the exchange; perhaps they asked directly if he were the Christ or maybe the Baptist knew what was in their minds and comes straight to the point. I have already mentioned that there was the danger that some people were promoting the Baptist above Jesus (cf. 7-8) so John quotes his words: "I am not the Christ." All down the centuries the Jews had been expecting their deliverer, the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek). Very likely the Roman occupation with all the restrictions this implied, apart from the humiliation that Gentiles were ruling the 'promised land', gave rise to the hope that this would be the time when God would act and another David would arise to free his people.

21. The Baptist is then asked if he is Elijah. The prophet Malachi proclaimed, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and terrible day of the LORD comes." (4:5). So the Jews were expecting Elijah. The Baptist says he is not. However, as Jesus and three of his disciples were coming down from the mount of transfiguration Jesus states that John the Baptist was Elijah (Matt.17:11-13). So what is the truth? It probably lies in the words spoken to the Baptist's father, Zechariah, by the angel Gabriel when he foretold his birth: "He will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah." (Luke 1:17) (Which quotes directly from Malachi about him turning the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.) Perhaps this reveals something of how the Father sees us. Of course, we are individuals, each is unique and precious, but our value to God is in how we relate to him. Are we open to his Holy Spirit? are we fulfilling the role he has designed for us? Elijah fulfilled his role by the power of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was sent to perform the same role in his time as Elijah had in his - to turn the people back to God; and he did this by the power of the same Spirit. So the Baptist, knowing he was not literally Elijah, answers "I am not". Jesus, thinking of the role he performed explains, "Yes he was." This leads to a further speculation. If, before Jesus came 'veiled in flesh' to be our Saviour, God sent his Holy Spirit in the person of the Baptist to warn his people to turn back to him, how much more likely that he will do the same again before Jesus returns as King and Judge. The Jews are still looking for Elijah and will leave an empty chair at the Passover meal in case it should be to their family that he comes. We may decry such a literal interpretation, but at least they take the prophecy seriously. It is unlikely to be Elijah the person who will come again, but we may expect either another John the Baptist coming in the power of the Spirit or, more likely now that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, we will see many men and women raised up in the power of that Spirit to proclaim the coming of the Lord. Whilst we must be careful not to explain away the clear teaching of Scripture, sometimes we can be too literal in our interpretation of it, and miss the wider implication of what God is saying.

John is asked if he is 'The Prophet'. Before he died Moses told people that, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers." (Deut. 18:15) The Jews did not associate this figure with the Messiah (as we realise is the truth). So they ask John if this is who he is. Again, the Baptist denies it.

22. So far the questioners have drawn a blank but they have to have something to report to the Sanhedrin, so they ask John for his own explanation of who he is.

23. The Baptist goes to Scripture for his reply. He claims to be the one foretold by Isaiah -simply a voice preparing the way for another. How wonderful it is when we discover the purpose for which we were created. We live in a world where there is so much competition; we have to do better than others, we have to win. But when we fulfil the role for which we were designed we have won, we are the best - at that role and that brings contentment. This is true at different levels. In the general sense everyone has been created to serve God and we find a contentment when we find him. However, there can be (and usually is) competition between Christians in the practice of their faith, and the deeper we go in the Christian faith the deeper the competition goes also. I must be a better evangelist, teacher, prayer etc. than others. If we seek the gifts of the Spirit to fulfil these tasks then I must have more words of knowledge or see more visions or interpret more

tongues than others. What a relief it was when I recognised that although we all have to give a reason for the hope that is in us to anyone who is willing to listen, I did not have to be another Billy Graham; I am a teacher - I love teaching; to help someone else understand something new in Scripture or about the Lord and to see the wonder of it dawn on them, is one of the greatest joys I know. I don't have to compete, I have only to be faithful to what God has chosen, called and empowered me to be: what a relief and what a joy. The Baptist was happy to be a voice - the voice foretold by Isaiah.

24-25. It seems that John implies that these answers would have been sufficient for the priests and Levites to take back to the authorities in Jerusalem. The Sadducees were more concerned as to whether John represented a threat to them and their position than to the Jewish faith. Provided the Baptist was not stirring up rebellion which the Romans would be forced to put down by force, probably they would have left him alone. However, John now reveals that there were some Pharisees who had also been sent to question him, and they wanted to dig deeper. If the Baptist did not claim to be the Christ, the Prophet or Elijah why and on what authority is he baptising people?

26. 26-27. The Baptist does not answer the question directly but points to someone else (whom we know to be the Christ). While John records the remark that the Baptist baptised with water, this leaves the sentence in mid air because he does not at this stage go on to state the details which Matthew records that the one who comes after will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His emphasis is to shift the interest from the Baptist to Jesus. To untie someone's sandals was the task of a very lowly servant. The Baptist feels he is not worthy to do even that for the one he is speaking of, whom his questioners do not recognise. This, of course, is a theme which will recur throughout the whole of this gospel - Jesus was not recognised for who he was.

28. We do not know where this Bethany was. Probably some considerable way north of Jerusalem. What is important is that John is precise; he deliberately distinguishes it from the Bethany where Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. This is not some creation of his imagination.

29-31. John gives a careful chronology here. The team from Jerusalem arrive to question the Baptist and, on the spiritual clock, that marks the beginning of the actual ministry of Jesus who has already been baptised and spent time in the wilderness. It is the very next day that the Baptist sees him and proclaims that this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and is the one he was talking about yesterday. To Jews, the phrase 'Lamb of God' would recall the whole sacrificial system where animals were offered as a substitute for the death of the person who had committed some sin. In particular, the Passover lamb, killed as a substitute for the firstborn - the last of the 'plagues' in Egypt. How much the Baptist himself understood of the significance of his words we do not know, but John undoubtedly had grasped far more than the association implied by the description. The eventual death of Christ, at the very time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple, epitomises the whole nature and character of God - self sacrificing love. And because it is the nature of the Creator, it is the principle which underlies the whole of life; it is the truth which prevails. In the end, love triumphs; it must do because that is the ultimate reality. It must not, indeed it cannot, dominate in the sense that it is forced upon the world. Evil will seek to take advantage of it and to overcome it. The way of this love, and the truth which it is, is not to fight back but to submit and allow its qualities to rise to the surface. This is why Jesus is the resurrection. He is truth, the ultimate reality. Everything not of the truth cannot exist in eternity because it is not of that which eternity is. Creation is the self-expression of God who is self-giving love. So the way of Jesus, who is God, is continuous self-giving. There is a sense in which Jesus does not have to do anything to defeat evil, he has only to be himself: the resurrection by its very nature overcomes. Of course, while this is happening there is suffering. There has to be death before there can be resurrection, and that suffering will go on as long as there is opposition to the truth which lies behind creation. Finally that opposition will cease but until then, as Paul said, "Overcome evil with good."

The Baptist explains that he did not know Jesus. That does not mean he was a stranger, indeed they were cousins; rather that he was aware that by calling people to a baptism of repentance he was preparing the people of Israel to accept someone else, but he did not recognise that Jesus was that someone.

32-34. The Baptist explains how it was that he did come to recognise that it was Jesus. He refers to the day, probably only just over a month earlier, when he had baptised him. He saw the Spirit descend on Christ in the form of a dove. It is interesting that he adds 'and remain on him'; he saw the dove arrive but not leave. What is the implication of the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus? Was he not already filled with the Spirit? It seems not (whereas the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his birth or conception [Lk.1:15]). Jesus was born or conceived by the Spirit (Lk.1:35), but not filled with the power of the Holy Spirit for ministry until his Baptism. When wrestling with the reason why Jesus was baptised, usually commentators state that it was not necessary because, after all, it was a baptism of repentance and Jesus had committed no sin; but that he did it to identify himself with mankind, each of whom is sinful. I would suggest that that explanation is inadequate. Certainly Jesus did not need a baptism of repentance but he did need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is in this that he is truly identified with mankind. Jesus was born of the Spirit; we need to be born of the Spirit also. In our case, seeing we have already been born naturally (of the flesh), it is a matter of being born again. Then, to equip him with power for ministry, Jesus was filled with the Spirit. Having been born again of the Spirit, we also need to be filled with the Spirit in order to have the power for our witness and ministry. It is in that much fuller sense that Jesus identified himself with mankind. When he became man he laid aside his majesty and was as dependent as we are upon his Father in order to work his works (14:10). Jesus performed no miracle until after he had been filled with the Spirit at his baptism and the obvious implication of that is that until then he had no power to do so. In Jesus the deity had become truly human with all the limitations that involves. The only difference between us and Jesus (and it is an important one) is that he was innocent of sin. He came to be another Adam, and was to succeed where the first Adam failed.

The Baptist proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God. It is doubtful whether he understood by that term what John himself had come to appreciate by the time he wrote this gospel. It is this fact which drove John to write it in the first place as he explains at the end:- "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (20:31).

35-36. We come now to the third successive day in John's record. The Baptist reiterates his proclamation that Jesus is the Lamb of God. We do not know whether the disciples were present on the previous day to hear that, but there can be little doubt that by drawing the attention of these two to Jesus in this way the Baptist is encouraging them to go to him. It is an act of great humility. How slow we are to learn that we must direct our husband or wife, our children and all who mean most to us, to love Jesus more than they love us; and, indeed, we must love him more than we love them. How ridiculous it is if our purpose in worshipping him is only to ensure that we will continue to enjoy them in eternity: that is to reverse the created order. God is the Creator, he made us for himself not for each other. It was after man came into being that God commented that it was not good for him to be alone. Whatever relationship we may have in the future with those we now love, it is only a consequence of our relationship with him. Life is in him not in them (4).

37-39. So the two followed Jesus. We are to learn (40) that one of the two was Andrew; surely the other was John himself. In his record he never pushes himself forward, but his report time and again (as here in 8) reads as that of an eyewitness. Seeing them Jesus asks a simple question, "What do you want?" It is the question that any of us might ask in that situation, but from his lips it is the most profound that he could ask. It hangs over every one of us, "What do we want from life?"

They reply by calling him 'Rabbi', a term of respect. The fact that John explains the title, translating it as 'teacher', is an indication that he was writing with Greek speaking readers in mind. The fact that they ask him where he was staying is much more than a polite enquiry; it is a request that they would like to talk with him. Combined with the word, Rabbi', it reveals that they wish to learn from him. The response, "Come and you will see," is an agreement to their request. To us it may seem highly coded; in fact it would have been quite normal to 'negotiate' the teacher-student relationship in this way.

Commentators argue about what is meant by "the tenth hour." There were two systems operating at that time; local Jewish custom or the official method used by the occupying Romans. If it was the Jewish system then it

would be 4pm, whereas under the Roman custom it would be 10am. We can never know for sure. Personally I take it to be 10am because that makes more sense of the statement that they “spent that day with him.” That would also allow time for Andrew to find Simon and bring him to Jesus that same day. A further point is that John was writing with Gentile Christians in mind and they would be used to the Roman custom. Irrespective of which time system John was using here, the interesting point is that he should record it at all. Perhaps it was indelibly etched upon his mind: “That was the time I first met and spoke to Jesus; the day that changed my life.”

40-42. We are given no details of what they talked about. However, they were obviously profoundly affected and excited by Jesus because Andrew immediately sets off to find his brother, Simon. There is some doubt about the word ‘first’. It could mean that as the first person to believe, Andrew went to seek Peter; or that Andrew was to bring many to the Lord (the Scriptures indicate that he did) but the first he brought was his own brother; or that both Andrew and John went to find Simon but the first to do so was Andrew. N.I.V. comes down very strongly on a fourth possibility - before he did anything else Andrew found Simon.

He tells him that he and John have found the Messiah (the Hebrew term which, again, John translates as the Christ, for the benefit of his Gentile readers). He is right, Jesus is the Messiah, but almost certainly Andrew did not grasp the full significance of what this meant. On the strength of one meeting with him he would not understand what sort of Messiah Jesus was to be - very different from what everyone was expecting. Nevertheless, Andrew was excited by what he had seen and found in Jesus; so excited that he had to share it with others, his own brother being the first. Why do I find it so difficult to share Jesus with others? He means so much to me, yet I am so unlike Andrew. As we go through the gospel we shall see that Andrew seems to be a born PR. man; always making contacts and bringing people to Jesus.

Jesus looks at Simon and tells him who he is and who he will be. We do not need to claim that Jesus used some supernatural power to know the name of Simon’s father. Andrew had been with Jesus all day and very likely Jesus had asked him about himself and he would have mentioned his father’s name, just as we use a surname. Jesus saw not simply Simon’s potential, what he could be, but what God had called him to be. No one is born into this world by chance or by mistake; God has a plan for every life. That plan can be thwarted (perhaps the greatest sadness is when it is thwarted by abortion) but it is there and everything that happens to us in this life can be used to bring that purpose to fulfilment. Jesus knows that Simon will become a rock (Cephas - Aramaic; Peter - Greek).

43-46. We come now to the final of the four days John is describing at the opening of Christ’s ministry. Jesus decides to leave the area of the Jordan where the Baptist is and go north to Galilee. We are told nothing of how he met up with Philip (along with Andrew a disciple with a Greek name) and invites him to follow him, which he does. He is so impressed that he seeks out his friend Nathanael and tells him that they (does the ‘we’ imply that at least one of the other disciples was with him, or is it a royal ‘we’?) have found the expected one, the prophet spoken about by Moses (see note on 21). He is Jesus who has been living in Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Immediately Nathanael raises the objection that Scripture does not mention anything about a prophet or leader coming from Nazareth. Indeed, he goes further, implying that Nazareth is not a particularly worthy town, although this may be no more than harmless rivalry from someone who comes from a different area. Philip does not attempt to argue but gives the wisest reply, “Come and see.” This is the only way that we can lead others to Christ. However well we may, and should, answer the questions of others, they have to come to meet Jesus themselves.

It is widely accepted that Nathanael in this gospel is the Bartholomew of the synoptics. The latter is the patristic name meaning ‘son of Tholomai’ just as Simon was Bar-Jonah. The fact that the synoptics link Philip and Bartholomew in their listing of the disciples adds further weight to this understanding.

47-51. John intrigues us with the manner of his relating this part of his story. There is something going on which he does not elaborate. Why does Jesus comment as Nathanael is coming towards him that, “here is an Israelite in whom there is no guile”? It seems that thoughts of the Old Testament character Jacob, who became

Israel, underlie the whole incident. Jacob was a man of guile, he was a con man. Although the remark seems to have been made about him rather than to him, Nathanael is near enough to hear it and asks, "How do you know me?" Apparently, although John has not informed us of this, Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree shortly before Philip had found him and Jesus reveals that he knew of this. The implication, which Nathanael immediately accepts, is that this was knowledge which Jesus had received in a supernatural manner.

Certainly it had a profound effect on Nathanael because he responds rather as Thomas was to respond when the risen Lord revealed that he knew what Thomas had said about the nail holes in his body, even though he was not present when Thomas had spoken (20:27-8). Nathanael proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God and the King of Israel. This is hardly a reasoned theological statement; it is a spontaneous response towards Jesus who has revealed he knows Nathanael more deeply than seems possible for a human being. Nevertheless, the statement is the truth. It embraces the two aspects of the person of Jesus - his relationship to God and his relationship to mankind, in particular to the people of Israel.

It goes deeper than this however. It was common for people to sit under a fig tree when they wished to meditate or think things through. The large leaves provided shade in the heat. It seems that Jesus was saying not only that he knew where Nathanael was, but what he had been thinking about because his declaration of who he believes Jesus to be seems excessive if it depends only on the fact that he knew he had been under the fig tree. Perhaps, and this can be only conjecture, Nathanael had been meditating on the story of Jacob, in which case the reference of Jesus to "an Israelite without guile," would have struck a chord in Nathanael which at first he probably assumed was coincidence. But when Jesus referred to him sitting under the tree, that would have made him wonder whether it was more than coincidence. If he had looked hard at Jesus to see if his face revealed more and if Jesus had 'smiled knowingly', that could well have prompted his exuberant declaration.

When Jesus responds by stating that if the declaration was prompted simply by the fact that he had revealed he knew of Nathanael under the tree, there was much more to come in the future, and then goes on to refer to the vision which Jacob had of a ladder set up from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it, that would have confirmed beyond doubt to Nathanael that Jesus knew the subject of his meditation.

Whether or not this conjecture about Nathanael's meditation is correct, there is no doubt that Jesus is referring to Jacob's vision and develops it by implying that he, himself, is the true ladder linking earth and heaven. He is both Son of God and Son of Man. (See note on 16:23.)

John has already quoted both the Baptist and Nathanael as proclaiming that Jesus is the first of these, the Son of God. Here he quotes the term which Jesus used frequently of himself, "Son of Man". Many books and articles have been written on its meaning and no detailed explanation can be given here. However, it is obviously important to grasp something of what it means in the light of the fact that Jesus used it so frequently.

The term appears in Daniel 7:13. Daniel has had a vision of four beasts, each of whom represents the ruler of a nation exerting great power and authority on earth. Then he says,

"In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

Whilst this is all highly symbolic it nevertheless conveys in a most encouraging manner that however much cruelty and injustice there may be within governments and nations, God has not lost control. History is not ultimately in the hands of beasts but of one like a human being, a Son of Man, who has access to the ruler of everything. Finally, it is this son of man to whom all authority and power is given and that is for eternity.

There is much debate about just how all this was interpreted at the time of Christ and how closely the Son of Man was identified as the Messiah and, of course, by his life Jesus filled out this description. However, it is a term which carries with it a meaning beyond itself. We are all sons of men in the sense that irrespective of sex,

we are born of other human beings; but the fact that this term was used by an Old Testament prophet, Daniel, and it refers to one like a son of man, gives it a special meaning. For it to convey this special meaning we have to grasp that it is speaking about someone who is not intrinsically a son of man, a human being, but is from or has access to God in heaven. It is because he is first the Son of God that Jesus stresses the fact that he is the Son of Man. The word has become flesh, he is a human being fully identified with mankind, but he is more than mankind. As we go through this gospel, John will reveal more and more how Jesus is both God and man.

## Chapter 2

### The first miracle

1-2. This simple story of a wedding where Jesus turns water into wine raises a number of problems which must be faced but which do not detract from the meaning and purpose John has in recording it. We have been told already that Jesus was intending to travel to Galilee (1:43) apparently, we now understand, it was in order to attend a wedding. Jesus lived life to the full and joined in times of joy and feasting; he was and is involved in all of life. The journey takes about three days from the calling of Philip and Nathanael. John never mentions Mary, mother of Jesus, by name - perhaps to distinguish her from the other Marys. There is no mention of Joseph and we must assume that he had died; indeed, if he had died some years before, this might account for the fact that Jesus did not enter upon his ministry until he was thirty. Until then he was working to provide for his mother and other members of the family. It seems that the wedding was of a relative of Jesus (tradition has it that Mary was the bridegroom's aunt) and this is why his mother was involved in the arrangements, knew of the failure of the wine and was able to give orders to the servants.

The first problem we meet is that not only was Jesus invited but so were his disciples, yet apparently Jesus has only recruited these six within the previous few days; so how had the news carried so quickly in time for the invitation to be extended to them? John does not bother to explain, it is enough that they were there. However, Nathanael came from Cana (21:2) so he may well have been invited in his own right (one tradition even makes him the bridegroom!) and the others came from Galilee. Even if they were not known personally to the families of the bride and groom, it is more than likely that when Jesus arrived with them, eastern hospitality would extend the invitation to them also.

3-4. Many commentators express the view that it was because Jesus and his disciples turned up that the wine ran out. On the other hand, we are told that they had been 'called' to the wedding and so were expected. The reason the wine gave out is unimportant; however, it was an embarrassing situation for the family and Mary felt it. So she turns to Jesus and explains the problem to him. Why? what did she expect him to do? At the end of this story John will state that this is the first miracle that Jesus performed, so Mary had no reason to think that Jesus would act in any supernatural way. Perhaps it was simply that following the presumed death of Joseph, she had come to rely so much on her eldest son and he had proved so reliable, that it was natural for her to turn to him when she was confronted with a problem. However, her instructions to the servants that they were to do whatever he said, show a remarkable trust on her part that he would come up with a solution.

The reply Jesus gives her creates a difficulty in our language. It sounds brusque to our ears. What son would call his mother 'woman'? That is not the case in the original. Admittedly it is not the closest of terms to use of his mother and some commentators see here a deliberate action on the part of Jesus to create a clear, though loving, division between himself and her. Now that he has entered upon his ministry the relationship must change; he is to be her Lord and Saviour as much as anyone else's. Apart from his manner of address, his comment, "why do you involve me?" is actually somewhere between, "Leave me alone" and "Leave it to me." John records also his comment, "My hour has not yet come." As a dramatic device in telling the story, this is brilliant. It puts into our minds the fact that there is 'an hour' which has some significance and it will come, but we are given no indication what that is. This is not to imply that it is simply a story teller's device and that Jesus did not say the words, he did, and the knowledge of the coming of 'his hour' overshadowed all of his ministry, becoming more and more of a burden as he neared the end. What that hour is will not be revealed until 12:23, when some Greeks come seeking him and he sees that as the sign that the time has come for him to be glorified (on the cross).

However, whilst his hour will not be fully revealed until his glorification on the cross, John will comment at the end of this story (11) that the turning of the water into wine was a revelation of his glory and in that sense it was his hour to begin the revelation of who he was. So was Jesus saying to his mother that it was not the time to begin that revelation, but then he had the inner witness of the Spirit that his Father did want him to begin that manifestation, and he changed his mind? Or was it that he was simply indicating to her that she was not to try to pressurise him because he would act only according to what his Father desired?

5. Mary is not put off and orders the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." If we would be servants of Jesus we must take those words as applying to us also. Indeed, it is by obeying them that we become his servants.

What would his feelings have been? He had never worked a miracle before; was he in any doubt as to whether he was able to do so? He must have been very conscious of his Father's leading because he is so confident in what he orders the servants to do.

6-10. The Jews had strict regulations regarding the ceremonial washing, not only of hands but of vessels and plates. At a wedding with many guests a great amount of water would be required. As the wine had run out they were obviously well into the celebrations and so the water pots would certainly not have been full. Jesus orders that they should be filled. That would have been a major undertaking; water was not on tap in those days. John records that the pots were filled to the brim, no doubt to show the magnitude of the miracle about to be effected.

We do not know whether all the water in the pots was changed to wine or whether it was in the pouring out that the change took place. If all was changed then we are talking of something between 120 and 150 gallons of wine - far too much for the wedding party to consume, so was some left over afterwards? Such speculation is pointless, but it seems that John intends us to understand that it was all changed into wine because he wants to stress the munificence of the Lord.

There was a Master of Ceremonies overseeing the wedding and Jesus orders the servants to draw from the pots and to take a sample to him. At this stage John has not revealed that anything had happened to the water, it is only as the M.C. makes his comment that John refers to it as "the water that had been turned into wine." In view of the time it would take to draw sufficient water to fill the pots there had probably been a clear period when no wine was available, so the M.C. would be aware that this was a fresh supply. He remarks that most people would serve the better wine at the beginning when people's palates were more discerning and provide the inferior quality later, but this is the best wine he has tasted at the feast. It is amusing to consider the effect his comment must have had on the bridegroom who would, presumably, have been completely mystified by it.

The meaning of the miracle

11. John states that this was the first miracle that Jesus performed. This totally invalidates those stories which some would invent of Jesus as a child healing crippled birds or animals. Jesus performed, and could perform, no miracle until he had been filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism.

Whereas the writers of the synoptic gospels speak of the miracles which Jesus worked, John prefers to call them signs. This is in line with his aim to get behind the events and facts of Christ's life and reveal what they mean. A sign points to something beyond itself; it is a sign of something. John selects just seven of the countless miracles (20:30 & 21:25) which Jesus did, in order to witness to a particular facet of who he is. Having considered the events which made up the miracle we must now seek to unravel what it is John believes it reveals about Jesus.

Obviously, the fact that water was turned to wine points to some astonishing power available to Jesus. If he can change the created order then this adds weight to John's claim that he was involved in the original creation, nothing was created without him (1:3). It is pointless seeking to discover how Jesus worked his miracles; whether it was a speeding up of natural processes, as some would claim or a disruption or overruling of them. Very likely there is a variety of methods. There must be an intervention in some spiritual dimension, but beyond that we cannot know. Jesus spoke or expressed himself and the thing happened (cf. comment on 1:1 under 'The Word').

However, John is seeking to convey something deeper still. Jesus can take the common things of life and if they are offered to him he can transform them into something wonderful; life itself will be different. Not everyone will know this; they may recognise there is something different about believers which they may

value, but it is only those who have put themselves under the authority of Jesus and who do whatever he tells them, who know the secret.

Some commentators see significance in the fact that John states that there were six pots. In Scripture the 'perfect' number is seven; and six is regarded as less than perfect (indeed in Revelation the mark of the beast is 666 [Rev. 13 :18]). From this they deduce that in John's mind the six pots represent the inadequacies of the law which Jesus replaces with grace. Perhaps this is so. However, I am reminded of the story of a group of scholars who spent some hours debating the significance of the water pots until one of them remarked, "Perhaps they were just water pots!"

John states that by performing this miracle Jesus revealed his glory. (For a discussion on the meaning of 'glory' cf. 1:14.) It was an insight into who he is and as that involves his glory it must be a revelation of that glory. It was prompted by a need and aroused the compassion of Jesus who is self-giving, self-sacrificing love. It prompted his disciples to put their faith in him. Obviously this does not mean that they understood all that he would come to mean to them, but it was a moment of decision. What they had seen and heard from him so far had impressed them sufficiently for them to travel with him. They wanted to learn more. Probably they had not considered in any depth how long they would stay with him or what the future held. However, this miracle convinced them that Jesus was not simply another Rabbi whom they could respect. This demanded more from them and they responded. For all of us faith is a journey - how terrible if it were not! How pitiful and unfulfilling if we did not grow and go on growing spiritually. Nevertheless there is a moment, even if not all of us can recall it, when we decide that we will trust Jesus with our lives.

12. Why does John record this? He does not record any particular event while they were at Capernaum on this occasion. Capernaum was to become the base for the Galilean ministry of Jesus but John specifically states that they stayed for only a few days. Nevertheless, his family was involved, not just his disciples.

13-17. Here we face a major issue. The synoptics put the cleansing of the temple at the end of Jesus' ministry and imply it was an important factor in arousing the anger of the Jewish authorities and their determination to put him to death. John puts it at the very beginning of his ministry and implies that it was the raising of Lazarus and the consequent allegiance of the crowd which prompted the authorities to demand his death. Thus there are three possibilities. It took place at the beginning, at the end or there were two cleansings. Although conservative scholars tend to this last view, it seems unlikely. The Gospel writers, wherever they put it, refer to only one cleansing and it seems strange that not one of the four should mention there was a repetition. Furthermore, if Jesus had done it once, it is most unlikely that he would have the opportunity of doing it again. He would surely have been recognised after the first occasion and carefully watched. Who, then, is to be believed, John or the synoptists? We cannot be certain but it may be that John has brought the event forward. Remember that he is much more selective in his approach than the other evangelists. It suits his purpose to portray Jesus as the Messiah, the God-man, from the outset of his ministry. To us this appears to be tampering with the truth, but it would not necessarily be regarded in that way at the time. If we are trying to give others a description of someone we remember we might say, "I recall him going to such and such and doing so and so." The important point being the fact that he acted in that way; when he did it is immaterial. Admittedly John appears to refer to a specific time - a first visit of Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover which the synoptic gospels do not mention - but it is the action of Jesus and what that reveals about him that is important, rather than its timing. It would be wrong to state that something happened if it did not but, in his culture, to amend its timing would not be regarded as unacceptable.

All Jews had to pay a temple tax and this could not be offered in coins which bore the head of any pagan ruler. Apart from the fact that the Roman occupying power had introduced their currency for everyday trading, at the time of the great festivals people would come from many different surrounding nations and so it was necessary to provide money changers near the temple. Also, it was against the law to offer for sacrifice any animal with a blemish, so all had to be inspected and approved. Obviously it was helpful to have animals already approved on sale. Whilst people were allowed to bring their own animals there was the temptation for the priests to find some imaginary fault and thus force them to buy from the traders in the temple at far higher

prices - no doubt with a percentage going to the priests. Similarly the money changers charged excess commission. All these traders set up their stalls in the outer court of the temple, which was the court of Gentiles, the only area where non Jews were allowed. What an impression that must have given to such strangers. A holy place had been turned into a market.

Did Jesus really use the whip against the men or was it simply the animals? The former would seem to be out of character; but he had no hesitation in scattering the coins and turning over the tables.

Whilst Jesus felt genuine anger at such desecration and injustice, his anger was controlled. He was aware of what he was doing and the effect it would provoke. This was a deliberate gesture which would bring him into the limelight. He had rejected the devil's suggestion to arouse similar attention by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple to allow the angels to bear him up, for that would have been a supernatural intervention and created the very impression about him he wanted to avoid. Admittedly, John has just given evidence of Jesus' use of supernatural power in the turning of water to wine, but this was prompted by concern for the embarrassment of the wedding family, and where so few realised that it was a miracle. Here he shows the man Jesus performing what can only be described as a Messianic act, especially in view of the fact that Jesus refers to God as my Father! This was a man with authority within himself acting on behalf of God in the sight of the very men, the priests, who ought to be doing that themselves.

The disciples recalled the verse in Psalm 69 which states "Zeal for your house consumes me." We recognise this as a 'Messianic Psalm' because it foretells so much of what happened to Jesus. It is doubtful if the disciples would view it in that way at the time (although John had probably come to do so by the time he wrote this) but it had a profound effect upon their growing understanding that Jesus was more than just another Rabbi.

Again, there is a deeper significance in the event; it reveals a principle. God is holy and those who worship him must do so in sincerity and truth. That principle has to be applied in our own places of worship. We need to be careful here. God is not against trade, indeed all of life can be a means of glorifying him. It is not wrong for churches to sell guide books, or any wholesome books and other articles pertaining to the faith. It was not wrong for the temple authorities to provide the convenience of money changing facilities or approved animals for sacrifice at a fair exchange or price, although it would have been better if the animals had been outside the temple than in it. It was the unrighteous trading which was offensive in the very place where the heart and its motives should be pure. That leads us even deeper. Jesus is about to speak of his body as a temple and Paul tells us that our own bodies are similarly temples of the Holy Spirit - corporately as comprising the Church 1 (Cor. 3:16) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19). They also must be cleansed if our worship is to be acceptable.

18-22. Because this was such a public act and in the light of the reason Jesus had given for doing it, it would have been difficult for the Jewish authorities to have arrested him; he might have the support of many worshippers who resented being fleeced. Nevertheless, naturally they wanted to know what authority he had for his action. Perhaps they did see it as Messianic; in any case he was claiming to act on behalf of God. In that case, if he were a prophet or claiming some such authority, let him perform some miraculous sign to prove it.

In fact, of course, the act itself was a sign. Malachi had prophesied, "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple." (Mal. 3:1) The answer Jesus gives is not straightforward; it describes a mystery which only those with eyes to see can understand. Later what he said will be misquoted against him at his trial, "We heard him say, "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." (Mark 14:59) It is not entirely surprising that they got it wrong because it did sound very much as though that is what he was saying (although he did not say I will destroy...). They naturally take it literally; he had just cleansed the temple and so they think he is referring only to that and point out that it has been in rebuilding 46 years (in fact it was still not complete), how can he possibly rebuild it in three days? John comments that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body and after the resurrection the disciples realised that.

However, John's comment is only a clue, the meaning is deeper. The answer Jesus gave covers an immense truth. The temple, like the tabernacle before it, was a symbol or type of God's presence with his people; it

was there that they could meet with him. However, the reality which God has always desired was that he should meet with each of us within our spirits - us in him and he in us. That is the dwelling place he requires. So while it is indeed true that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body it was not only that, he was referring also to the actual temple which he had just cleansed. Yes, his body would be destroyed and he would rise again, but the actual temple also could be destroyed because the need for it had gone - or was about to go. Eventually it would be destroyed, under the Roman occupation, because it had been replaced by individual believers and by the church made up of those believers. That is where God is to be found today. In Jesus, the perfect man - the forerunner of all believers - God dwelt bodily (Col. 1:19). So, says Jesus, you can destroy the temple, the type or symbol of the place where God dwells, just as you will destroy my body, but three days later, the place where God really dwells will be raised again. No wonder the Jewish authorities and the disciples did not understand all this at the time.

By recording this saying of Christ following the cleansing of the temple, John is clearly stating that Jesus was aware all through his ministry that he would die (be destroyed) but would rise again after three days. It is quite wrong to suggest that it was fortuitous that by adopting the adversarial line which he did, Jesus' ministry brought him into conflict with the authorities and ended in his death. It did indeed provoke such a conflict but Jesus knew from the beginning that he had come to give his life "as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

John does not specify any particular Scripture which the disciples believed after Jesus had risen, as a consequence of the cleansing of the temple and his comments about a sign. On the road to Emmaus Jesus explained what was said in all the Scriptures about him.

23-25. John does not elaborate on the miracles which Jesus performed in Jerusalem at this time but he records that many people did believe in him (or in his name). However, what was the nature or reality of this belief? It seems that Jesus regarded it as similar to that he will encounter in the crowd who followed him after he had fed them on loaves and fishes (Chapter 6). It does not involve entrusting themselves to him. So he will not entrust himself to them.

When John says that Jesus knew all men; that does not mean that he knew everything about everyone he met. It is rather that he knew human nature. The supernatural knowledge he displayed in speaking of Nathanael (1:47 ff.) and the woman at the well (4:7 ff.) etc. was a revelation given at the time by the Holy Spirit; it was a word of knowledge imparting information he could not have known otherwise. Because the imparting of a word of knowledge is a gift of the Holy Spirit available to us today, this does not impair the true humanity of Jesus.

## Chapter 3

### Nicodemus

1-2. The story of Nicodemus follows directly after John has said that Jesus knew what was in a man. Here is someone to whom he can entrust himself to a considerable extent. He was a Pharisee and often they are depicted as coming in for extreme criticism from Jesus. It is true that he did indeed point out that they did not live up to their own strict code of practice, but he respected what they stood for and he obviously warmed to Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin - that body which sought to preserve the purity of the Jewish faith. Much is made of the fact that he came to Jesus by night. It may indeed be that as a member of the Sanhedrin, he wished to avoid publicity, but it could be also that he wanted to have a profound talk with Jesus when he would not be disturbed.

We must remember that this was a private conversation and it is most unlikely that the disciples were present. Therefore John was relying on a report of it from either Jesus himself or even Nicodemus. Nicodemus begins with a solicitous remark, even calling him 'Rabbi', but it may well reflect the view of at least some of the Sanhedrin that it was difficult to explain the miraculous signs that Jesus had accomplished unless he was, indeed, from God. Was the word 'we' more than an official greeting? Was he, in fact, representing a group from the Sanhedrin?

3-4. Even allowing for the fact that the conversation undoubtedly involved much more than the few words recorded here, John wants to show that Jesus goes to the heart of the matter Nicodemus has come to discuss - what life is meant to be, how it is lived out; that is to say, the sort of life needed to enter the kingdom of God. Like other Rabbi's, Jesus often makes statements in an arresting manner; the meaning is not immediately clear but the words are sufficiently intriguing to encourage further thought and questioning. Here he states that let alone entering the kingdom of God, no one can even see or comprehend what that is unless he is born all over again from above. (The word can mean 'anew', 'again' or 'from above'; there is no need to choose between them.)

Underlying the whole of what Jesus is saying is the truth that faith is a gift of God. There are certain things that a person can and must do, there are choices to be made, but here Jesus likens faith to birth in which the person is passive; it is something that happens to him or her. When Jesus states (7) that a person must be born again, he is not implying that effort must be made, rather that it is essential it happens, and that is an act of God. This teaching stresses one side of the argument which has continued down the years of the Church's history regarding predestination and free will. With the level of understanding we have in this life the two seem mutually exclusive: in fact, both are involved and must, somehow, be complementary.

Once again there are various levels of understanding John's words. Nicodemus, who must have been used to this method of teaching, apparently takes the words literally and asks how a person can re-enter his mother's womb in order to be born again. However, it may be that he is going along with the style that Jesus has set and is saying that he has been brought up in the traditional faith and it is too much to expect him to be able to make the radical change that Jesus seems to demand - he cannot abandon all he has believed throughout his life and start all over again.

5. Jesus now concentrates on what Nicodemus wants to know, how we enter the kingdom of God rather than just seeing what it is. He also explains what he means by being born again; it is by water and the Spirit. By speaking of water he must be referring to baptism. He, himself, was baptised by John the Baptist and we will learn (22) that he also baptised others at the hands of his disciples (4:2). Immediately before his ascension he commissioned his Church to make disciples and baptise them (Matt. 28:19). So the baptism of his followers is obviously important to Jesus. However, baptism is only a sign, albeit an effective sign, of the new birth. In the rest of the discourse Jesus does not speak of water but of that which it signifies - the Holy Spirit.

6. Jesus contrasts the flesh with the Spirit. From the text alone there is no indication whether and where John is speaking of the Holy Spirit or the human spirit, but the context makes it clear that the N.I.V. is correct in its

use of the capital 'S' (for the Holy Spirit) and the lower case 's' for the human spirit. It is the former which gives birth to the latter. Jesus makes clear that there is a deeper level of life than the purely physical; for instance, everyone recognises that he or she has emotions. We have souls as well as bodies. If the body is that which enables us to function in the material world through the senses and may therefore be described as being the world-conscious part of us, then the soul is that which makes you 'you' and me 'me' and is self-conscious. The soul is the person indwelling the body and which, we believe, continues to exist when the body dies. It is that part of us which feels and thinks and decides. But there is a third area (we are tripartite beings), we have a spirit and it is our spirit which is intended to be in communication with God; it is that part of us which is to be God-conscious. Jesus is not talking symbolically here; he means that when a person is born into the world his or her spirit is not functioning as it was designed to do.

In Genesis it is recorded that God instructed man that if he disobeyed him, by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. In fact, man continued to exist, but his spirit, that part of him through which he is to communicate with God and God with him, that which is intended to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, withered. God did not leave himself totally without witness, he raised up prophets upon whom his Spirit did come; but the people as a whole were estranged from him (and if you are estranged from God, the only source of life, you are indeed perishing). Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is at Sinai when the people told Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." (Ex. 20:19) What Jesus is telling Nicodemus is that natural birth conveys body and soul - our ability to live on this earth and to think, to feel and to will. He refers to these attributes as 'the flesh' (Paul also uses this term to refer to man in his fallen human state, in contrast to the spiritual man who does not walk after the flesh but in the Spirit). Flesh can give birth only to flesh, it is the Holy Spirit who gives birth to man's spirit - give life to that part of him which is withered and latent. Jesus is not talking in symbolic terms; when a person repents and believes, that is turns away from the life he has been living and entrusts his life to Jesus, something really happens within him, his spirit comes alive, he is open to receive spiritual truth; he is now able to comprehend or see what the kingdom of God is all about. There is now a place where the Holy Spirit can come and dwell within him. He has been born of the Spirit (anew or from above [3]) and needs only to be filled, and go on being filled, with the Spirit. Thus the Spirit creates his home within a person and then takes up residence.

7-8. No wonder Jesus tells Nicodemus not to be surprised at his saying that a person must be born again. However, this is a sovereign act of the Spirit and it can no more be controlled by us than we can control the wind which blows where it wills. The Hebrew and Greek words most frequently used for 'spirit' in both the Old and New Testaments can also be translated as 'wind' or 'breath'. This is a useful simile because you cannot see the wind, you can know it is there only by its effect on other things; when it blows through trees it creates a sound and it shakes the leaves. Meteorologists can tell us what causes a wind but in practical terms we do not know where it starts or ends. Similarly we may notice the effect of the Holy Spirit upon a person, sometimes dramatically but certainly in the change in behaviour and personality, but we cannot actually see the Holy Spirit himself.

9. This is beyond the experience of Nicodemus and so it is also beyond his understanding. To him faith was understanding and keeping the law. The law was everything, it wasn't a matter of feeling or experiencing the presence of God; you simply obeyed instructions.

10-15. The words Jesus uses in reply are very strong: "You are a respected teacher of God's people, yet you don't know what I am talking about?" On the one hand we might question why Jesus was so surprised that Nicodemus did not understand. Surely the point of telling Nicodemus about the need to be born again of the Spirit was that Jesus realised he did not know it already. On the other hand we need to remember that Jesus had never known personally what it was not to have his spirit functioning. He did not need to be born again of the Spirit because his conception was not natural, nor of human decision, nor a husband's will (1:13); his first and only birth had been of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't filled with the Spirit with power until his baptism, but he was born of the Spirit. So he had grown up as a human being aware of God's presence with him all the time - something Nicodemus had not experienced. Nevertheless, there are many references in the Old Testament to the Spirit e.g. "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." (Ps.51:11)

What is the significance of Jesus turning, in the same sentence, from 'I' to 'we' (11)? Is it a form of the "Royal 'we'" as when Queen Victoria said, "We are not amused."? If not, who are the others he is linking with him? It may be that just as Nicodemus has used 'we' (2) identifying himself with his fellow ruling Jews, Jesus links himself with John the Baptist in proclaiming spiritual truths. There is also a problem raised by his claiming to have seen. It is one thing to claim to know the truth of what he has been saying about the work of the Holy Spirit, but what is it he has seen? Can this relate this to his pre-existence in heaven? Was Jesus, during his earthly life with a human brain, really conscious of the details of how he had lived in heaven? If so, for me, that would seriously impair the reality of his identification with mankind. I do not doubt that Jesus had such a pre-existence and that he realised that was so, (e.g. "before Abraham was, I AM." 8:58), but I do doubt that he was aware in any detail of what that existence had involved. Probably what Jesus was saying here was that he had seen the effect on people when they were born of the Holy Spirit. Jesus claims that he is only speaking the truth, the reality, but Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees (perhaps fellow members of the Sanhedrin, which would therefore embrace the Sadducees also) will not accept his testimony.

So far Jesus has only explained to Nicodemus earthly things. Things pertaining to true religious life here on earth - in fact the very things which the Scribes and Pharisees spent their time studying and debating; to them a matter of understanding and then obeying the law. Jesus has spoken of the need for a spiritual rebirth. He has not yet said anything about a plan for the redemption of the world which will be accomplished by God himself and in which man has no part except to receive it.

He then makes what seems to be a jump in the argument, "No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven." Is this referring back to his claim to speak of what he knows and has seen? I do not think so. I have already rejected the idea that Jesus was born with a brain that retained a memory of his pre-existent state in heaven. More probably it relates to the future and thus to 'heavenly things.' How can mankind enter heaven? No-one has ever done it except himself (and to be over literal, even he has not yet re-entered heaven, but he came from there); he is of heaven, heavenly. And he is the one who will blaze the trail, he will open the gate of heaven to all believers. He is about to hint at how that will be achieved - he will be lifted up. Just as the people of the Old Testament, when wandering in the wilderness and attacked by venomous snakes, were saved by gazing at a replica of a snake which Moses raised up on a pole so he, Jesus, would be lifted up. Those who put their trust in him will be the ones who receive eternal life and enter heaven. The phrase, 'lifted up,' if left without further explanation as it is here, implies triumph and John does indeed see the cross as a triumph, but at this stage he has introduced no hint of suffering and sacrifice

Here Jesus uses a term, the Son of Man, which he obviously preferred to all others as a description of himself. Only very rarely does he speak of himself as the Son of God, and there is textual doubt about most, if not all, of those. 'The Son of Man' is a phrase that occurs in Daniel 7:13 of one who has access to God and who is given immense authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. It is a Messianic title yet one to which Jesus gives new meaning - as he does, of course, to the whole concept of who and what the Messiah is. It is first an identification with mankind and the suffering experienced in this life; yet, whereas so often the rest of us are overcome by what we face, Jesus transforms the suffering and triumphs through it and over it. He identifies with us where we are but leads us to another place, onwards and upwards.

Once again we are back to the phrase 'believes in him.' (cf. 1:12) This means much more than to believe that he exists; it is to entrust ourselves to him. Perhaps the greatest effect of the fall is that we all imagine that we can be independent, but we were created to be dependent - dependent on God. It is to say and to mean, "Your will not mine, your way not mine, O Lord."

16. This is perhaps the most famous verse in Scripture and I believe that this section is more likely to be John's comment (based, perhaps, on 8:14-16) than the words of Jesus himself. We have seen from Chapter 1 that God is always active, always expressing himself. Because he is love he is always expressing that love and that love is expressed in action. It is for the whole of his creation. That creation may be marred because of mankind's sin but the love of God goes out in constant restoration and redemption. It is not just the Jews, not

just believers, indeed not just human beings, God loves the whole world! However, although the whole work of redemption is accomplished by God, we have to respond to it in order to benefit from it.

John uses the little word 'so'; God so loved that he gave. He gave his one and only Son. At this stage, of course, John does not and cannot reveal what this giving involved - his death; that will evolve as the story is told. However, what he does reveal is that gaining eternal life is not a matter of performing enough good works or keeping the Law of God, no one can win or earn his or her own salvation. It is a matter of entrusting ourselves to Jesus and allowing him to bring us into the eternal kingdom.

17-21. There is the strong implication also that those who do not entrust themselves to Jesus will perish. It is not God's intention that any should perish, Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. Because Jesus has within him the source of life (1:4) then those who put themselves 'in' him, entrust themselves to him, already have that life. It is not simply that on the day of judgement they will not be condemned, such a person is not condemned now but anyone who does not so entrust himself to Jesus is already in condemnation because he or she has not recognised and responded to the fact that light, the true light, has come into the world (1:5). It is a fact that goodness brings condemnation of evil. When we are in the presence of a kind and selfless person, we feel guilty that we are no like that. We can deal with the situation in one of two ways: either we can determine to be more like that person or we will distance ourselves from them, possibly even seek to disparage them in order to bring them down to our level and then we will not have to change our ways. Jesus came to provide for all mankind the way to life. When a person is faced with him, either he will surrender and take that way or he will reject it and have nothing to do with it because he is unwilling to change his ways and the very presence of the truth embarrasses him, so he will move away from it.

We have already said that no one can win his or her own salvation, all we can do is accept the salvation God offers us. However, when we do that we are in the light and our behaviour will and must change to be worthy of that light; indeed we desire it to be and constantly allow the light to reveal if it is.

The N.I.V. and some others, have a footnote that some versions end the quotation of the words of Jesus after verse 15, thus making the following verses a comment by John. It seems that John has spent so long thinking about the significance of what Jesus said and did that it has become part of him, and it is not easy to know just where the actual words of Jesus end and John's comments begin.

22-26. John now describes the transition from the ministry of the Baptist to that of Jesus. Apparently Jesus and his disciples, having left Jerusalem, spent some time in the Judean countryside on their way back to Galilee. There they baptised although, as the next chapter will make clear, Jesus personally baptised no one but worked through his disciples. What was this baptism? Was it identical to John's or did it include the anointing of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit was not given until after Christ's death and resurrection (7:39) so certainly it could not have involved the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but may well have included a promissory aspect.

The other Gospels make no reference to the ministries of the Baptist and Jesus continuing side by side; according to them, as soon as Jesus appears John the Baptist is removed from the scene and is thrown into prison. In fact the latter continues his ministry for a while. We cannot be sure where Aenon is. The word is probably a derivation of one meaning spring or fountain. There is a place approximately two thirds of the way up the Jordan from Jerusalem to the Lake of Galilee with seven springs; perhaps it was there.

John records an argument breaking out between John's disciples and a particular Jew (possibly a group) about purifying or cleansing. We do not know the details but somehow in the dispute Jesus was mentioned. It may well be that this Jew was extolling the teaching of Jesus to the detriment of the Baptist; in any case it seems that he brought the news that Jesus was now baptising people. Seeing it was John who had baptised Jesus, the disciples of the former are put out to learn that he has apparently set up in opposition; especially as their master had borne such generous witness to him.

27-30. John uses the witness of the Baptist to Jesus but is careful not to give him cult status (see note on 1:6-7). He does not make his own comment but records John's view of himself. Perhaps the greatest attribute we can have in this life is to know who we are; this gives us security. To know we are loved and chosen by the God, who created everything, gives us a sense of our true importance and authority. To know that we are nothing apart from him will keep us humble. To discover our role in life brings fulfilment. This is what the Baptist displays: he knows his role. The peak of his life's work was the moment he recognised Christ as the one to whom he was to bear witness. Unexpectedly for him, he had the task of baptising him, and he then directs his own disciples to follow him. From that moment his importance in the world was to diminish. He knew it and was happy to accept it, but he had to explain the situation to his uncomprehending disciples. He reminds them that he foresaw this situation and likens it to a wedding where it is the bridegroom who is to have the bride; the best man, the bridegroom's friend, is delighted for him, not jealous. It is one thing to recognise all this but not so easy to accept it - as human beings we all enjoy the approval and regard of others. The Baptist is remarkable in that he does, "He must become greater; I must become less." Believers could not find a better text with which to begin each day.

31-32. Once again there is no indication of whether these are still the words of the Baptist or, more likely, the comment of John. The argument is this: we human beings are designed for heaven but we begin life on earth; ours is a life of intended ascendancy. Jesus is from heaven; he had to descend to earth before he could ascend. So his relationship with his Father and, therefore, eternity, is different from ours. It is remarkable that nowhere in Scripture does Jesus link his Sonship with ours; he speaks of, "My Father and your Father." We may be his brethren but the quality of our Sonship is different; we are adopted, he is the only begotten. So he brings an understanding of eternity and eternal truth which we do not have, even though we have the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In referring to Jesus testifying to what he has seen and heard, John is not speaking of literal memory and description of heaven (see note on v.11 of this chapter), he is speaking of the unbroken relationship Jesus had with his Father during his earthly ministry as when he was in heaven. Jesus reveals eternal and heavenly truth because of who he is.

33. John says that no one accepts the testimony of Jesus but immediately goes on to speak of those who do. This is very similar to 1:11-12. It is true that the world as a whole does not believe in Jesus but there are those who do and these people are confirming that God is truthful in his attestation, at his baptism, that Jesus is his Son. We must remember the different culture of that time from that of today. In our time many people are atheists or at least agnostics; they not only reject Jesus, they doubt the existence of God. In those days virtually no one doubted the existence of God or the gods, but they may well have rejected the claims of Jesus. Those who accepted him showed that they accepted God's witness to him.

34. Because of his intimate association with God, Jesus, the one God has sent, speaks the words of God; he is the expression of God because God does not limit his Holy Spirit. The Authorised Version says, "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." The words 'unto him' are not in the original. It seems that what John is seeking to convey is that Jesus is so totally open to God that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." (Col. 1:19) However, with us, although we are all to be filled with the Spirit, he distributes his gifts individually amongst us (1 Cor. 12:7ff.) so that together we make up the body of Christ on earth. John is not confining his argument to the gifts of the Spirit but he is making a differentiation between the extent of the working of the Spirit in Jesus and in us. That may be because we are none of us willing or able to open ourselves totally to God as Jesus did.

35-36. The simplicity of this statement is remarkable. The Creator of everything, the power and source behind it all, goes out in self-giving expression towards the Son and entrusts everything to him. Jesus is the clearest, most complete representation of God which we may know. Because he has life in himself (1:4) all who are 'in' him, who have entrusted their lives to him, have that eternal life flowing through them; for eternal life is not a state, it is a power - the expression of God himself - which indwells us. However there is a corollary; anyone who is not so aligned with the expression of God and his will that his life flows through them, is outside his plan and purpose and that life cannot reach them or benefit them. That situation is a 'state'. They exist in an unreal world, that is a world which is not of the truth and therefore has no

permanence. It is not so much that God's anger is personally directed against them, but they are of that which is not in his eternal plan; so it can be said that they remain in that which is contrary to eternity, (which may be described as God's wrath) or that God's wrath remains on them.

## Chapter 4

1-3. The N.I.V. skates round a minor problem. The original states that the Lord discovered that the Pharisees had heard that "Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John." To make sense of the terms 'Lord' and 'Jesus' when they both refer to the same person, many translations put the last nine words within quotation marks, as here, although the A.V. does not. N.I.V. rather cleverly transfers half the phrase to v.3, which makes the meaning abundantly clear. The authorities were worried enough about John the Baptist, now it is reported to them that Jesus is gaining and baptising even more disciples than the former. Jesus does not want to precipitate the inevitable clash because 'his time has not yet come,' so he decides to leave for the north where he will not draw the same attention from the Pharisees. Incidentally, John makes it clear that Jesus never personally baptised anyone, so there cannot be any question of a claim to superiority.

4-6. Between Judea and Galilee there lay Samaria. During the exile the Jews left behind in Samaria intermarried with peoples of other nations brought in by their conquerors. At the restoration, when the Jews who had returned from captivity were rebuilding the temple, they refused to allow the Samaritans to help because they had not kept themselves pure. This had caused a rift and the Samaritans had set up an alternative place of worship to Jerusalem on Mount Gerizim. Many Galileans going up to Jerusalem, took a detour around the borders of Samaria rather than pass through the country; however, Jesus chose to take the shorter route. The plot of land which Jacob had purchased (Gen. 33: 18-20) lay on the way and there was a well there bearing his name. Weary with the journey, Jesus stops there to rest. In stating this John stresses the full humanity of Jesus, he was tired. The Christian doctrine of Jesus is not that he was 50% God and 50% man but that he was 100% God and 100% man.

Once again there is a problem over the time. In the Jewish reckoning the sixth hour would be noon, the hottest time of the day. Why would the woman (7) come to draw water then? Some claim that her loose manner of life made her a subject of abuse and so she came when it would be unlikely for her to meet others. Under the Roman system, the sixth hour would be either 6am, which does not fit the context, or 6pm, which does.

7-9. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. As she points out, he is out of order on two counts; he, a Jew, is speaking to a Samaritan and he, a man, is speaking to a woman. John explains that Jesus is alone with the woman because the disciples had gone into the nearby town - almost certainly Sychar just over ½ mile away - to buy food. Probably it was usual for Jews who took the shorter route through Samaria to carry their own supplies, to avoid having to buy any from the Samaritans. Perhaps it was due to the sudden decision to leave Judea (3) that Jesus and his disciples had none, and maybe it was Jesus himself who actually instructed his disciples to buy food from the local town because he was not interested in maintaining ancient barriers. This reveals one of the most amazing and exciting things about Jesus - he was not bound by tradition. He was aware of tradition and valued it but he was not bound by it; he did not bring a whole amount of baggage with him as he encountered fresh situations, whereas we do. Even in our application of Scripture, we bring preconceived interpretations of what it says and what it means. Jesus was able to see everything from God's perspective and reveal God's attitude. Obviously this was because he was totally at the disposal of the Holy Spirit who led him into all truth. Think what this story reveals: Jesus was willing to trade with the Samaritans rather than maintain traditional enmity, he broke through a false separation of the sexes by speaking to this woman and, whilst being aware of her unsavoury past behaviour, he was willing to accept her fully as a person. Here is a visible demonstration that God so loved the world. There is an additional possible understanding of this incident. Perhaps the words 'the Jews do not associate with Samaritans' are more specific and mean 'do not share the same vessels with Samaritans'. If this is so, then Jesus is indicating that he is asking to use the pitcher of the Samaritan woman - thus breaking down yet another barrier.

10-12. I do not believe that Jesus asked for a drink only in order to engage this woman in a conversation which he had pre-planned; he was genuinely thirsty. However, in the light of her reply he was more than ready to make full use of the opportunity she had given him to open her eyes to the truth of God. His words are nothing less than a Messianic claim. There are countless places in the Old Testament where God speaks of

giving water to the thirsty (e.g. Isaiah 55:1, Ezekiel 47:1-12). As with his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus speaks in terms which require the listener to think carefully in order to understand. He speaks first of 'the gift of God.' Ultimately, of course, that gift is God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in going on to refer to 'living water' Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit (cf. 7: 37-39), but the woman takes the words literally; 'living water' would be flowing water rather than that which has gathered at the bottom of the well.

Travellers at that time would often carry with them a leather bucket and a length of rope in order to draw water from wells. The woman, believing Jesus is speaking of the spring which supplies the well, points out that he has no means of gaining access to that spring. Nevertheless, she is beginning to think more deeply and refers to the creation of the well by Jacob. If Jesus is speaking of being able to tap into the source of the spring, is he claiming to be greater than Jacob?

13-14. Here Jesus is speaking of the deep dissatisfaction that lies within each of us. Usually it is unexpressed but it revolves round the questions of meaning; why am I here? why does anything exist? where can I find fulfilment? In chapter 6 Jesus will speak of himself as the bread that satisfies and link that with his ability to quench the human thirst (35), here he speaks only of thirst, but the underlying truth is the same. Purpose in life is to be found only as we align ourselves with the plan and purpose of God and the only way to do that is to believe into Jesus. So he tells the woman that water from Jacob's well can never quench the thirst he is speaking about, that can only deal with physical thirst which will return again and again. The living water he offers is spiritual and because of that, once received it is not that the person no longer has any thirst - our spiritual life is not deadened - but rather our spiritual desires are enhanced but are constantly met as we develop and mature by the water (the Holy Spirit) constantly bubbling up within us. Jesus condenses the argument by saying that a person who drinks the living water will not thirst again because, of course, a desire which is constantly met is fully satisfied.

15. There are two possibilities here. 1) The woman regards Jesus as something of a crank and her request for this water is a form of humouring him because she doesn't for one moment believe he can give her anything which will avoid her having to come to the well daily. Or 2) She is intrigued and beginning to move in her thinking. She doesn't dismiss Jesus as a crank, although she might well have done; after all, he is a lone stranger acting in an unusual manner and making peculiar claims. But there is something about him which causes her to take him seriously. She asks him to give her this water. Whilst she is still taking his words literally because her reason for asking is that she will not have to continue making the journey to the well, she must be aware that whatever sort of water he is talking about, it is totally unlike anything she has ever heard of before.

16. The instruction of Jesus that the woman should call her husband comes as a shock. It doesn't seem to follow the course of the conversation. It could be, of course, that we do not have the full conversation and John springs this on us for dramatic effect. William Temple suggests that the Lord's intention was that the truth of the gospel should be shared with her husband also. It is much more likely, however, that having brought the woman to the point where she is asking for the 'living water', he wants to prepare her to receive it, she must recognise her need. He goes straight to the heart of her problem - her dissatisfaction with herself; she knows that her life has been wrong for years. Jesus also knows it.

This raises the question of how Jesus knows it. It is over-simplistic to say that Jesus is eternally God and therefore in his earthly life he knew everything. Apart from questioning whether a human brain could possibly contain all the 'knowledge' of God, this would undermine the true humanity of Jesus. Whilst he could never cease to be God in his essential being - he could not be other than what he is - on earth he had only a human body and brain. This was specific knowledge imparted to him by the Holy Spirit at that time. It was what Paul refers to as a 'word of knowledge' (1 Cor. 12:8).

17-18. Unaware that Jesus knows her situation she replies that she has no husband. Undoubtedly she is hedging, seeking to convey that she is either single or a widow.

What Jesus does now must have devastated the woman. He reveals that he knows that she is not married to the man she is living with at present and that prior to him she has already had five husbands. Of course it is possible that all of these had died, but most unlikely. It may be that she was not legally 'married' to all or some of the five (anymore than she is married to her present partner) but in the eyes of God sexual intercourse is supremely the 'act of marriage' and in that sense Jesus refers to all of them as her husbands. However, even allowing for the fact that all five were in fact her legal husbands, it reveals a life style which could not bring deep satisfaction to the woman. Jesus begins by saying "You are right when you say..." and ends with, "What you have just said is quite true." He stresses the literal reality of what the woman has said - she has no husband.

19-20. The woman's reply causes us another shock because, as with the Lord's instruction for her to call her husband, it doesn't seem to follow the line of conversation. There are two possibilities; 1) The woman is deliberately trying to change the subject and, realising Jesus is a prophet, seeks to divert him into an academic theological discussion. Or 2) She has been deeply challenged and is faced with the person she really is. Aware of her failure and need - in a word, her sin - she looks for a way to set things right. As a Samaritan she has been taught to look to mount Gerizim, near the well, as the place of worship, but the man who has revealed that he knows her so thoroughly and who therefore must be a true prophet, is a Jew who would claim that Jerusalem is the true place for worship. If he knows so much, perhaps he knows the truth about where to worship.

21. It is a human trait that we try to control everything, including religion. If we have a particular religious experience which we wish to repeat, we attempt to recreate the circumstances in which it occurred. We use the same words or adopt the same position or return to the same place; that is, we seek to formalise what was a free act of the Holy Spirit. Tying worship to a place is to misunderstand the nature of worship. Jesus seeks to explain this to the woman. In doing so he personalises God by using the term 'Father', something he had not done with Nicodemus. Admittedly he had used the term in relation to himself (3:35) but here he is clearly applying it to the woman and so to all true worshippers.

22. Although Jesus was breaking down the barrier between Jew and Samaritan, it is a fact that the faith of the latter had been influenced by other religions and, in any case, they accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not have the rich heritage of the prophets or the psalms.. It was the Jews who knew that God was righteous and demanded righteousness from those who would worship him. It was they who were God's chosen people - chosen to reveal him to the world. God loves all nations but it is the Jews he has chosen to be a light to the Gentiles.

23-24. One of the reasons Jesus appeared was to unite us to the Father; indeed, that is the supreme reason, although that may be explained in various different terms. Whatever barriers he might break down between man and man, his greatest achievement was to break down that between man and God, which he accomplished by his death and resurrection. The time for that was nearly here - less than three years ahead. In fact, this was similar to the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom could not come on earth until he had opened the way, yet the very fact that he, the king, was here meant that people could gain entrance to it then and there by accepting him. So the time for the barrier between God and man to be torn down was also already here. Because of his perfect and unbroken relationship with the Father it was possible to worship God through him, even before the cross.

The reality of worship (i.e. its truth) does not depend on outward form or place, it is a matter of inner conviction, integrity, yearning and response. In order to worship God truly, it is essential that a person's spirit should come alive, for this is the part of our being which is designed to be God-conscious. (For a full explanation of this see note on 3 v.6). True worship involves relationship; that is what God desires and that is why ritual and place may be aids to worship but can never substitute for it.

Modern translations are correct in rendering "God is Spirit," where the King James had "God is a Spirit" - which alters the meaning. Scripture uses many similes and pictures to describe the invisible God who is wholly 'other'. All explanations involve using the familiar to describe the unfamiliar. It would be meaningless if all we could say was, "God is, but he is unlike anything": although that is the truth. We speak of God's eye seeing

us, of his arm protecting us, but then we have to say that he does not have a body. We speak of him rightly as 'Father', but have to go on to say that he is neither male nor female, although masculinity and femininity in us spring from him because there is no other source from which all things come.

What are we talking about when we use the term 'God'? We are speaking of an energy which does not take up any space - a concept no longer totally incomprehensible now that we know of 'black holes' and a universe which can collapse into itself. An energy which is constantly expressing itself and is self-giving to the extent of self-sacrificing itself because that 'itself' is love - not 'loving' but 'love'.

Worship must be a response to that self-sacrificing love, involving a similar self-giving; the whole of what we are, offering itself to the object of its desire - its Creator. During the 'Age of Reason', that is the past 500 years or so, there has been a growing tendency to discount emotion in religion; we are to believe the truth and not rely on feelings. Over the past two decades or so there has been a greater recognition that there is a place for feelings; a faith which is only cerebral is dry and unattractive. It may be a duty to worship God but it should also be a joy. The soul of a person is that which thinks and feels and decides involving, therefore, mind, emotion and will. All this, our total being, is caught up in worship and so there is both emotion and knowledge. We are to understand, at least as far as the human mind is capable of understanding, who it is we worship, what he has done, how he acts towards us. So truth is involved. We worship in spirit and in truth.

25-26. The woman is obviously impressed by Jesus, but cannot follow his argument fully. It seems that what she is saying is, "You are probably right but it is beyond me. When the Messiah comes he will make it all clear and then I will understand." Because the Samaritans accepted the first five books of the Old Testament they knew that God was going to raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18) and, like the Jews, referred to him as the Messiah. The conversation with Jesus had reminded this woman of the coming Messiah and her mind, and perhaps her heart, were open to receive him. So Jesus says, simply, "You are speaking to him." The pronoun 'he' is clearly implied and our translations are right to include it, but it isn't necessary in the Greek which does not have it and which literally is, "I who speak to you, I AM". This immediately recalls the revelation of God to Moses by his name 'Yahweh', which Jesus will use specifically as John's story unfolds.

The question arises why was Jesus willing to reveal himself to this woman as the Messiah, and so early in his ministry, when he was careful not to do so to others? Probably because she was a Samaritan and he was only passing through the area. The Jews would discount anything said by Samaritans who would not generally stray far from their own land, so there was very little likelihood of the revelation causing problems for him.

27. John records that it was just then that the disciples returned from their errand. He might well have said "When they returned;" it seems that he wants to draw attention to the timing. Had they returned earlier they would have interrupted the conversation between Jesus and the woman. The strength of the word 'surprised' or 'astonished' reveals how women were regarded and treated at that time. The Rabbi's had laid down, "Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife." Jesus was both free and confident enough to break with tradition. John implies that it was so astonishing that it would have been most natural for the disciples to ask, "What do you think you are doing?" Yet he recalls that not one of them did so.

28-30. Here there is one of those touches which show that this is an eyewitness account; John tells us that the woman left her water pot. Obviously, therefore, she intended to return, but there is more to it than that - Jesus would have the drink he had requested and, if the suggestion is correct that the comment in v.9 is that "Jews do not share the same vessels as the Samaritans" (see note), then the woman was inviting Jesus to break that taboo.

However, her purpose was to share her experience of Jesus with others in the town. This may well have been difficult for her if she was something of an outcast (see comment on v.6) but it reveals what should be a basic instinct for every new convert - to tell others what has happened to us. Obviously there was more than John records. There must have been a sense of urgency and excitement about the woman. Perhaps she had run part of the way and was out of breath. She took the initiative and deliberately attracted attention, accosting people,

calling them together so that she could share her news. Of course it is not literally true that Jesus told her all she had ever done - apart from anything else there would not have been time for that. However, she was convinced he knew her through and through. Apparently she does not go as far as saying that this stranger has made the claim that he is the Christ, but she sows that thought in their minds - "can he be the Christ?" There is a truth here for us; it is right to share our own belief but not to impose it on others. Our task is to introduce others to Jesus but allow them to make their own conclusion as to who he is.

The effect on her is so obvious and surprising that the curiosity of the town's inhabitants is aroused sufficiently for a large number of them to want to see this man for themselves and they start out towards the well.

31-34. It seems as though Jesus had been particularly exhausted by the journey or, more likely, by the teaching and other events which preceded it, because he had not accompanied his disciples on their errand to the town. (Leaving aside any providential action by his Father to engineer the opportunity for his discussions with the woman, I am speaking of the practical reasons for Jesus being left alone at the well.) So the disciples encourage him to eat something. However, he seems to be astonishingly revitalised and, speaking as he had to Nicodemus and the woman (and to many others), in terms which carry a meaning beyond the actual words he uses, he tells them that he has food to eat which they know nothing about. Like those others, the disciples take his words literally and ask each other (but not him), "Has someone brought him some food while we were away?"

It is a phenomenon that dealing with some crisis or becoming involved in something which deeply interests us arouses reserves of energy we did not know we had. This is particularly so in spiritual matters. To be about the work of God is stimulating. This is what happened to Jesus as he spoke with the woman and saw her respond to the truth he had shared. Jesus was totally dedicated to fulfilling God's will. His cry from the cross was "Finished" - "accomplished".

35-38. Some commentators claim that "Four months more and then the harvest," was a proverb relating to the period between sowing and reaping. However, in Palestine the period was six months and, in any case, there is no evidence of this proverb in any other source. It may be that as they travelled through the countryside the little group had noticed the fields and had remarked amongst themselves, "another four months and it will be harvest." In fact, we cannot be sure what prompted Jesus to utter these words. However, the point he is making is clear. In the spiritual realm there need be no delay. This truth must be balanced by what Paul explained, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Cor. 3:6) Indeed, Jesus himself goes on immediately to refer to this; "One sows and another reaps." The harvest does not always, or even frequently, follow on the sowing of the word. However, in times of revival - a sovereign act of God - this does happen. No doubt the Lord (and John who reports this) had at the back of his mind the prophecy of Amos that the days were coming when, "the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes." (Amos 9:13)

Many commentators draw attention to the fact that the procession from the town towards the well was probably clearly visible to Jesus. It maybe that the majority of the people were wearing white robes and Jesus makes a gentle play on the words when he tells the disciples to lift up their eyes and look for the fields are already ripe and white for harvest. This is a prologue to the work of the disciples and, after them, of the whole Church. These Samaritans are forerunners of the all people. Men and women are looking for truth and when it is presented in a way which will meet their need, they will respond. The harvest is there.

Verse 38 raises problems. When had Jesus sent the disciples to reap? Is he referring to their baptising many people (vv. 1-2)? John has not recorded every event in the life of Jesus, he has had to make a selection, so maybe the Lord had already sent the disciples on some mission. Whatever the particular circumstance of this statement, it is true that every Christian is to reap what others before him have sown and to sow what others who come after him will reap.

39-42. Here we see the progress of faith. We so often judge people by how far they have progressed, Jesus is more interested in the direction in which they are travelling. His command is not that we should believe certain doctrines but that we should follow him. When, therefore we read that someone 'believed' in Jesus, it means that they had sufficient faith to follow him. If they continued to do so, obviously their understanding and faith would grow and we may read that they 'believed', meaning that they had progressed a further stage. The woman's testimony was such that many of the Samaritans were convinced that something very real had happened to her and were prompted to come to Jesus themselves. They were so impressed that they urged him to stay with them, which he did but for two days only. During that time many more saw and heard him and became believers and, no doubt the faith of all of them grew. They explained the truth to the woman - "At first ours was a second-hand faith; we believed because of what you told us had happened to you. But now it is a personal faith - we have our own relationship with him." They say that they believe that Jesus is not simply the Messiah but that he is the Saviour of the whole world. That direct statement appears in only one other place in the New Testament - 1 John 4:14. Did they really understand that at that stage? If they did indeed use those words, did they appreciate their significance, or is this John interpreting their undoubted faith in Jesus in the light of his own understanding when he wrote? It seems that this is all part of their growing faith; their "following Jesus."

43-45. After staying the two days mentioned in v.40 Jesus resumes his journey to Galilee. John's comment in v.44 may at first glance seem out of place. In fact it follows on from what was explained in the opening verses of the chapter. In Jerusalem Jesus was attracting unwelcome attention from the Pharisees; he was not yet ready to reveal himself openly. So he deliberately returns to Galilee where every one knows him because that familiarity will mean he is less likely to be given a false status of honour. His countrymen welcomed him because many of them had seen what he had done in Jerusalem. That does not mean they believed he was the Messiah, but they were proud that someone from their region had created such an impression there. No doubt they felt that, being so far from the hub of national and religious life, Galileans were ignored or dismissed by the authorities.

46-47. Nevertheless, Galilee was part of the nation and there was some royal official based in Capernaum who had a son who fell so seriously ill that he was dying. On his way north, Jesus reached Cana and the official heard about it and came begging him to come home with him and heal his son. This in itself is remarkable. He must have been torn between staying with his son and making the journey to find this healer, knowing his son might die while he was away. Of course, he would do anything he could to see his son healed, but it shows he must have had a strong belief that Jesus would be able to help.

48-53. The words of Jesus in response, set out as they are by John, seem particularly harsh towards a man in such distress. What lies behind them? Is it that Jesus is vexed because people do not understand what he is trying to show them but constantly seek some sensational act? Or is he seeking to draw out greater faith from this man? Or perhaps a combination of the two? N.I.V. has "you people" to show that the pronoun is plural and he is not speaking of the official alone. Maybe he is contrasting the people of Galilee with those he had just met in Samaria who were willing to believe in him much more readily. It may be that the words are spoken more as a question than a statement, "How is it that you always need to see some miracle before you will believe?" and some versions translate them in that way.

The father is too distraught to argue or to defend himself; all he wants is for Jesus to come and save his son. That perseverance of faith brings the response he desires and more. He already has the miracle; he does not have to wait until Jesus reaches his home, his son is healed then and there - literally "your son lives." But his own faith is stretched and tested: he believes, he trusts Jesus to have spoken the truth and he leaves; but until he reaches home it is a walk of faith not sight. The distance between Cana and Capernaum is some 18 miles. The impression is that he set out immediately on the return journey but he must have spent the night somewhere because we know it was not until the next day that he reached home and it is very unlikely that he would travel by night.

The son's recovery is so instantaneous and complete that the servants are despatched (presumably expecting they might have to go all the way to Cana) to tell their master the news. They meet him on the road and he asks them the exact time that his son recovered and they reply, "the seventh hour." Once again we have the problem of whether this was Jewish or Roman time. Under the former it would be 1pm. That would fit well if the official had left home first thing in the morning because he would have reached Cana about midday. Even though he would then have had time to set out on the return journey at once, he would probably have been too tired to have travelled far that day. Under Roman time it would have been 7 pm. In which case both the official and the servants would almost certainly have waited until the morning to set out on their respective journeys. There is so much we do not know - for instance, as an important official would he have had a horse or would he have walked? The point John is making is that the son was healed at the very moment Jesus had spoken the word. He shared this knowledge with his household and they all believed. Once again, what did they believe? John is obviously implying that it was more than that Jesus was a magician, faith in God was involved; but we do not know whether that included the fact that Jesus was the expected Messiah.

54. This raises a problem. John has stated that the turning of water to wine at Cana was the first of Jesus' miraculous signs. He then records that while he was in Jerusalem "many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing" (2:23), and adds that Nicodemus referred to that, "No-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (3:2). Yet here John states that the healing of the nobleman's son "was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed after he had come from Judea into Galilee." If we read that as meaning that it was the second which he had performed in Galilee as distinct from those he had performed in Jerusalem, there is the problem that the first was before he went to Jerusalem and only this, the second, was after he had returned from there. Nevertheless, that is probably what John meant; it was the second miracle performed in Galilee. It is interesting that both took place at Cana, although this latter one had its effect in Capernaum. Remember that John is selecting the miracles on which he wishes to comment. Here, surely the overriding point he is making is that the power of Jesus was not confined to the physical area where he happened to be.

## Chapter 5

Many scholars believe that this chapter and the next have become switched and originally what is now chapter 6 came before this chapter 5. There are good reasons for believing this, mainly with regard to the number of journeys Jesus made to Jerusalem and back to Galilee, and I am inclined to accept this view. However, I will here preserve the accepted order.

1-4. There is no agreement amongst commentators as to which feast this is, Passover, Pentecost or Purim. It depends to some extent on whether chapter 6 precedes chapter 5 (see 6:4). There is also some doubt over whether the pool was called Bethesda (House of mercy) or Bethzatha (House of Olives). John sets the scene by explaining that round the pool there were covered colonnades where large numbers of disabled people gathered. Verse 4 does not appear in the best manuscripts but without it there is no explanation of why they did so, nor can we understand the answer the paralytic makes in v.7. Very likely in making a copy of this gospel, a scribe entered helpful background information in the margin and later this became incorporated in the text. Apparently from time to time there was a disturbance in the water, possibly because of some surge of the spring serving the pool. A belief had grown up that this disturbance was caused by an angel and the first person to enter the pool after it happened would be healed. Such a belief would give a very distorted view of God; one who healed people by making them watch for a disturbance of the water and left it to a race between them as to who could get into the pool first. Also, it could lead to an underlying distrust and resentment amongst those who gathered there because a mobile newcomer would inevitably get into the pool ahead of a more disabled veteran who had been there for many years. This is exactly the situation with the person Jesus picks out.

John gives no explanation of why Jesus was at the pool, nor can we be sure whether any of the disciples were with him because they are not mentioned.

5-9. We do not know why Jesus was drawn to this one man, nor who told him that he had been a cripple for 38 years (for there is no reason to think that Jesus was given some supernatural knowledge when a simple enquiry would yield the information). We must assume that it was the Father's will to heal this man and this was revealed to Jesus by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. However, that does raise the very difficult problem of God's attitude to all the others who were there who were also in need of healing. We know that on other occasions Jesus healed many (Mark 1:33), why not now? We know also that there is no record of Jesus refusing anyone who came to him for healing (he initially prevaricated over the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:25) because his ministry at that time was confined to the Jews, but her need was met). Here however, he takes the initiative. All we can say is that God is sovereign and we just do not know why he chose to heal this man and not the many others.

Jesus asks the man if he wants to get well. This may appear to be an unnecessary question, after all, why else was the man there? Nor was it simply a means of introduction. It was when Jesus learned how long the man had been disabled that he asked if he wanted to get well. It would involve a major change in lifestyle. No longer would he have people who would carry him to and from the pool each day; he would have to take responsibility for earning his own living; he would no longer spend each day with familiar faces. Was he really willing to accept this traumatic change? We all need to question whether we are willing to make the changes Christ asks of us. If we would be made whole. Are we willing to give up our resentments and our self pity and all the other defences we put up to protect ourselves from the hurt which is involved if we really give ourselves to others?

The man does not answer the question directly but offers an explanation of why he cannot get into the pool before someone else gets there ahead of him. His hope is in a superstition, Jesus directs his attention to himself. John gives no record of any further conversation but with a word Jesus heals the man. The gospels record many different methods that Jesus uses to heal people, here he does it by a command to the man to do something, to act as though he were already healed. He is to get up and pick up the mat or light mattress on which he was lying and walk. Instead of arguing that he cannot, he obeys and discovers that he is cured. It was

important that he picked up his mattress to encourage him to realise that he was able to do it - he was fully healed. Perhaps also it was important psychologically to sever his links with the place where he had lain for so long. He needed his bed, but it had to be placed somewhere else from then on.

10-13. John now reveals that this miracle was performed on the Sabbath. The Jews, that is the leaders, the members or representatives of the Sanhedrin, challenged the healed man because he was carrying his mattress on the Sabbath. The fourth of the ten commandments lays down that no work is to be done on that day and the reason is that God himself rested on the Sabbath from his work of creation over the previous six days. Jeremiah was ordered by the Lord to stand at the gates of Jerusalem to watch people going in and out and was told to say, "Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem." Nehemiah also spoke out against the same practices and stationed men at the gates to prevent anyone coming in carrying a load on the Sabbath. He makes it clear, however, that he has in mind the merchants who wish to trade on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:20-22).

The man explains what has happened and his excitement at his cure is obviously at the forefront of his mind, "But it was the man who healed me who told me to pick it up and walk." It is so revealing of the attitude of the questioners that they ask not, "Have you really been healed? who was it who was able to do such a thing?" but, "Who told you to pick it up and walk?" They were more concerned that he was carrying his mat than that he could carry it; that the letter of the law had been broken than rejoicing at the wonder of the power of God revealed before them. We may condemn them for their blindness but we also are all too ready to interpret our faith in terms of law.

The man did not know who Jesus was; obviously he had not seen him before, and Jesus had simply mingled again with the crowd. How often are we unaware of the source of some blessing? we enjoy it but do not know that it is a gift of God.

14-15. Is there significance in the fact that the place where Jesus meets up with the man next is in the temple? It would be encouraging to believe that the man was in the temple to give thanks to God for his healing but the truth is that the temple was the hub of activity and the man could have been there for any or no reason - everybody has to be somewhere. At first sight the remark which Jesus makes to him would imply that his disability had been due to some sin which he had committed, and that may be so, but not necessarily. It is impossible for us to know the exact circumstance of the remark or the tone in which it was uttered. It may simply have been a comment that now that the man was able to live a normal life he should take heed as to how he lived it. The novelty of good health should not make him profligate with it. Wasting his life could bring greater problems than those he had known when he was disabled.

Again, we cannot know the motive of the man in informing the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. To us, aware of their attitude to Jesus, it seems a foolish, almost vindictive thing to do. It may well be, however, that he simply wanted the leaders to be aware that a great healer was in their midst.

16-18. Rather like a slow crescendo in a symphony, John shows the opposition of the Jews to Jesus increasing. Until now they had little that they could give as a reason for their opposition. Admittedly he had cleansed the temple and accused them of desecrating it by their involvement in trading in it, but that was hardly breaking the law of God. Similarly with the fact that he was baptising people; that was obviously against their custom and it would arouse their anger at him, but it was difficult to find a specific charge they could bring against him. Now they had one; not only was he encouraging others to break the Sabbath by carrying a load, he was himself working on that day by performing miracles. The tense of the verb implies that he was continually breaking the Sabbath.

The reply that Jesus gives is interesting; he does not dispute the fact that he was working on the Sabbath but he goes behind the law to show that although the commandment is based on the fact that God worked on creation for six days and then rested, his rest did not imply that he was no longer working at all, but simply from the work of creation. God did not start the cosmos going and then leave it to run by itself. He is continually

“sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Heb. 1:3) That is to say, creation only continues to exist because God continues to exist; he is constantly expressing himself (see note on ‘Word’, 1:1) and Jesus aligns himself with his Father, allowing God to work his work through his human body (14:10). So he explains that his Father is at work and so is he. Notice that Jesus refers to my Father; he always draws a distinction between his own relationship with God and ours - “My Father and your Father,” never “Our Father.” The Jews ignore the content of what Jesus is saying and concentrate on the terms he uses; the use of the pronoun ‘my’, protesting that this means he is claiming to be equal with God. If Jesus is allowed to continue in this manner their own position as the teachers and rulers of the Jewish people will be totally undermined and their opposition is increased. John now reveals that they had already reached the stage of seeking to kill him.

19-30. The answer that Jesus gives is important because it reveals how John had come to regard Jesus. Obviously it is based totally on what Jesus said about himself, but the other Gospel writers do not bring out this teaching so clearly. Whilst John had begun his Gospel with the statement that Jesus was eternally God, here he quotes the words of our Lord that during his earthly ministry he had no independent power; he relied totally upon the power of his Father working in him. Thus he really is as we are (and the power at work in Jesus has been made available to us in the person of the Holy Spirit: John does not reveal this corollary here but this teaching will develop as the gospel continues).

We have already seen that John selected a very few particular miracles from the many which Jesus performed because they illustrated a greater truth than the miracle itself. He chose this one, the healing of the cripple, because it gave rise to some of the clearest teaching about himself that Jesus gave. In speaking of the time of God’s salvation Isaiah had said, “Then will the lame leap like a deer.” (Is. 35:6) Both by the miracle itself and now by his discourse, Jesus is revealing himself as the Messiah. Far from denying the charge that he is making himself equal with God he strengthens his claim to a special relationship with his Father. However, it is one based on obedience, dependence and love. In this he was what man was intended to be, he was a second Adam, performing not his own will but that of his Father; and the motive was love. Jesus did not doubt that his Father loved him; hence his devastation on the cross when his Father abandoned him, promoting the scream, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” If only we were equally convinced of the Father’s love for us - and, because he cut himself off from Jesus when he bore our sin, we need never experience any abandonment.

The point Jesus is making is that if the Jews condemn him for healing on the Sabbath then they are condemning God himself because the healing was not accomplished by the power of the Son but of the Father. They claim that the law of the Sabbath is God’s law, but it is God himself who is breaking this law. Something is incongruous here - it must be their interpretation of the law.

Jesus was conscious all the time of his Father’s love; part of the evidence of that love was that he revealed to the Son what he was doing. The clear implication here is that it had been the Father who revealed to the Son that he was to heal that particular cripple by the pool. The next sentence is rather unexpected. It is not that the Father will show the Son greater things to amaze him, nor that he will show the Jews greater things to amaze them; rather he will reveal to the Son greater things that he, the Father, wants him, the Son, to perform and these things will amaze the Jews. Jesus immediately goes on to explain what the greater things are than healing a cripple - it is raising the dead and judgement.

Having said that “The Son can do nothing by himself” (19), it seems to be a contradiction to say that “The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (21). However, it is all part of the generosity of the nature of the Father, he is self-giving love; he has life in himself and has granted the Son to have life in himself (26), because he trusts the Son to use that power only in accordance with his (the Father’s) will and do only what he sees the Father doing (19). Jesus goes on immediately to speak of judgement because, of course, the two - eternal life and judgement - are inseparable. This is a constant theme in this gospel; eternal life is dependent on unity with Christ and if we are truly walking with him we cannot continue to sin. It is the eternal life within us that continually draws us towards righteousness.

The Father has entrusted all judgement to the Son (22) and has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (27). At first sight it may seem that the meaning here is that this ensures that the judgement is utterly fair. The Father has never been man and so he does not fully understand us and our temptations; but Jesus has, he knows our weaknesses and will sympathise with our weaknesses. However, a moment's thought will show that this cannot be the meaning for this is to confuse the verdict with the sentence. Whether or not a person is guilty is simply a matter of fact; sympathy and understanding of motive have no effect on that. With regard to the passing of sentence, it is ridiculous to imply that the Son may be more merciful than the Father; the two are at one in seeking to be merciful, "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... God did not send his Son to condemn the world but to save the world through him" (3:16/17). Admittedly Hebrews refers to the fact that, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are" (Heb. 4:15), but this is in Jesus' role as priest not as judge. So this statement about the Father committing all judgement to the Son must refer to something else.

The judgement of Jesus does not relate so much to his view or opinion of us and our deeds as to what he is in himself. In the same way that light brings judgement in that it reveals and exposes, so it is with Jesus. His judgement of us is, in fact, our judgement of him. It is what John was trying to convey in his record of our Lord's meeting with Nicodemus. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already... this is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light" (3:18/19) It is in this sense that the Father has committed all judgement to the Son; Jesus is the judgement because he is the truth, how people respond to that truth reveals who and what they are. The word of God in the Old Testament, the law, has become flesh in the person of the Son of Man (27). "He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father." That is why Jesus links honouring the Son with judgement (22/23).

In v. 24 Jesus is developing the meaning of vv. 3:18/19 quoted above; whoever recognises the truth of what Christ says and rightly responds to it has already passed over the chasm between death and life, the judgement has already taken place. So the judgement does not only lie in the future, it has already come when those who are spiritually dead (and that is everyone, because we none of us understand the truth until we discover it in Jesus) will hear his voice and (and here Jesus speaks in shorthand, assuming the need for the right response - belief in him and the one who sent him [24]) will live. It extends beyond this to those who are in their graves, the physically dead (who, of course, are also spiritually dead), even they will hear his voice and those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will be condemned. Is this then a different standard? are these, who have died before the coming of the Word in the flesh, to be judged according to their works and those after his coming by their faith in him?

This answer to this is both yes and no. Those who died before his coming cannot possibly be judged on their response to the Son of Man because they did not know him. But God had expressed himself before the coming of the Son, . All Creation is the self expression of God. Scripture describes this by explaining that God said "let there be..." and there was! (St. Paul uses this argument in Romans chapters 1 & 2 to explain why no one can say he or she could not know God.) God continued to express himself. The ten commandments, and the whole of the Jewish Scriptures - the law, are the self expression of God in words; together they are the Word of God. Finally the Word of God became flesh, the Son of Man, who is the clearest self expression of God to mankind. Prior to his coming, men and women revealed their response to God in their response to his word - the law. Their love of God was expressed in keeping his commandments. When in these last days God spoke by his Son (Heb. 1:2), men and women reveal their response to God by their response to his Son, the Word made flesh, and express their love by keeping his commandments - "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). So under both the old and the new covenants men and women are judged by their response to God who revealed himself first in creation, then in the law and finally, most perfectly, in the Son of Man; and this response is expressed in their seeking to keep his commandments.

If we are judged on how we respond to God (and in a sense that means whether we are walking in the way he has designed all creation, including mankind, to work - walking in the way of his commandments, 'going with the flow of life') and if Jesus, the Son of Man, is the most perfect revelation of God and we are judged, therefore, on how we respond to him, it might be thought that some personal pique might enter into his

judgement against those who reject him. But Jesus refutes that. Although the Father has committed all judgement to him (22) in fact the judgement he applies is that of the Father, the source of absolute truth; personal feelings are not involved. The Son is not seeking to please himself but to do the perfect will of the one who sent him (30).

Throughout the whole of this discourse Jesus has been using the words 'life' and 'death' in their two meanings, physical and spiritual. It is not difficult to follow which meaning he is adopting and where the two overlap e.g. those who are in the grave are the physically dead who will be raised either to spiritual life or to condemnation. (For an explanation of 'eternal life' see note on 10:28) The whole teaching springs from the healing of the cripple at the pool which illustrates the power of Christ to bring new life. That is why John included this as one of the 'signs' in his gospel.

Of course, it is easy to understand the hostility of the Jews. Almost everything that Jesus says, raises the tension further. It begins with them claiming he had broken the Sabbath (16). Then he claims that God is his Father (17); then that he has the power to give life (21) and finally that judgement, all judgement, has been committed to him (22). The Jews are faced with stark alternatives; either they admit the claims of Jesus and accept him as God made man and honour him accordingly (23) or they must seek to destroy him and his influence.

31-40. The Jews required the testimony of two or three witnesses as proof of the truth (Deut. 17:6) but, of course, it is universally recognised that more than a person's own testimony to himself is needed. Jesus admits that and is about to give them three (and probably four) witnesses - above all the Father himself. First, however he refers to John the Baptist. Although he was a controversial figure his basic message was that people should repent and prepare themselves for the coming of the expected Messiah and so, whatever problems he caused (although he was son of a priest, he had an unconventional life style and was not one of 'them') the Jews could only admire and accept his ministry. They had sent to him (1:19) and he had testified to Jesus (1:29 ff.). John was not the light but had certainly borne witness to it (1:8) and was, in that sense a lamp himself, shedding light. However, Jesus did not rely on such human testimony, he mentions it not to bolster his own claims (because they did not believe him), but because they had been prepared to believe the Baptist and if they really accepted his testimony and also responded to Jesus as the Baptist had, they would be saved (34).

So the Baptist is the first witness Jesus mentions but he turns to weightier testimony. Secondly the work which the Father has given him to do. That work is to bring in the Kingdom of God and to bring people into it. It will not be accomplished until Jesus offers himself on the cross for the sin of the world with his great cry "It is finished, completed; I've done it!" However, that is only the supreme accomplishment of the work that is he already doing. The healing of the cripple at the pool, which gave rise to this discourse, is all part of the bringing in of the kingdom on earth and witnesses to the truth of the claims which Jesus is making.

Thirdly there is the direct testimony of God (37). Jesus may mean the inner testimony we have when we recognise the truth; John refers to this in his first epistle, "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart." (1 John 5:10) Or he may be referring to the testimony of the voice from heaven at his baptism, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), which the Jews to whom he is speaking would not have heard. Whichever meaning is involved, and they are not mutually exclusive, Jesus deals with their lack of response in v.38.

The fourth witness is Scripture which the Jews studied so diligently. This speaks of Jesus, as he explained to the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27), yet they totally missed the truth. It is still possible to know the Scriptures and even obtain high academic honours in understanding how they came to be written and what they mean, yet not know the Lord to whom they bear witness. Christianity is Christ, the Scriptures bear witness to him but they cannot themselves give life, only he can do that because he has life within him. But the Jews would not come to him to have life..

41-44. Jesus was not interested in receiving approval from other people, his only concern was to have the approval of his Father. In this he differs from just about everyone else; we all want to be liked or, at least, to be accepted. We seek our self worth in the approval of others. This is why those who come in their own name, with their own agenda and self image, were accepted by the Jews; we all welcome those who appear to be influential and those who confirm our own views. But Jesus did not seek to justify himself nor seek his own ends, he came only to do the Father's will; he came on his Father's behalf, that is in his name. The Jews, like us so often, sought the approval of their peers and rejoiced in a mutual admiration society instead of seeking the approval of God. They did not have the love of God in their hearts and so they did not recognise Jesus nor his claims. If they had truly known God they would have recognised both the deeds and the teaching of his Son.

45-47. Here we see again the truth that the judgement of Jesus is not primarily a matter of his opinion or view (see note on v.22), it is simply a total exposure of the situation which then virtually judges itself. The Jews revered the writings of Moses - the first five books of the Old Testament - they used them to refute heresy and they formed the basis of their opposition to Jesus. But, Jesus claims, 'if you read them aright you would see that they speak about me' (e.g. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers." [Deut 18:15]). The very writings on which they are relying to oppose him will, in fact, be their condemnation. However, if they do not understand and accept the truth of the words written by Moses how will they understand and accept the words which Jesus speaks in their hearing? The error is still rife today; the word of Scripture can be applied in a legalistic manner which is totally against the mind of Christ.

## Chapter 6

1-4. The story of the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists. We need to go to the synoptics to fill in the background but, as we would expect. John adds details and implications which they do not include.

Jesus needed to spend time with his disciples. Some commentators believe that following the altercation with the Jews recorded in chapter 5 Jesus withdrew to the safety of Galilee; however, if these chapters were originally in reverse order, as seems most probable (see notes on the opening of Ch. 5), he was already in Galilee having just left Cana for Capernaum. Matthew and Mark place this event directly after Jesus had heard the news of the death of John the Baptist, which obviously affected him deeply and they imply that Jesus needed to get away for a while with his friends. Luke sets it directly after the twelve disciples returned from their first mission and so this was to be a time of debriefing and refreshing. It is he alone who gives a name to the place, Bethsaida. This causes a problem because Mark refers to Bethsaida being in Gennesaret (6:45 & 53) which stretches North West of the Sea of Galilee. (After the feeding of the people the disciples depart by boat for Capernaum, according to John (6:17) but for Bethsaida according to Mark (6:45), so presumably the two were close together.) But we know that this miracle took place to the South East of the top of the Sea of Galilee and, indeed, a place called Bethsaida Julias was situated there. So it appears that there were two places with the name Bethsaida, which may be why in 12:21 John states that Philip came from Bethsaida in Galilee to distinguish it from Bethsaida Julias. There is the objection that it is unlikely that there would be two places with the same name so close together on the shores of the sea. However, the name means 'house of fish' or 'of nets', and so it is very probable that there could be two places with such a name in a fishing area.

After ministering to the sick in Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples set out by boat towards Bethsaida Julias across the Sea of Galilee. John gives it its other name, Sea of Tiberias because it was probably better known as that by the majority of his readers. The people would have been able to follow the course of the boat very clearly and enthused by the miraculous healings they have seen, they hurry round the lake by land, probably double the distance by sea. It would take about three hours to cover the distance involved at a steady but not forced pace. Jesus and his disciples went a little way up a hill ('mountain' is too strong a word, there are no mountains in that area) and sat down to relax together.

John adds the information that the time of the Jewish Passover was at hand. The fact that he does so must be significant, but in what way? Is it that it is 'The Feast of Unleavened Bread' and John is about to record the feeding of the five thousand leading to the claim of Jesus to be the true bread? Or is it that the Jews were in bondage under the Roman occupation and the Passover recalled the deliverance of their ancestors from bondage in Egypt, so their minds were the more ready to look for a deliverer; Jesus was a likely candidate and hence their desire to make him king (15)?

5-6. It must be admitted that there are a number of apparent discrepancies between the various evangelists in their reports of this incident. Mark says that some of the people ran round the Sea and actually reached the spot ahead of Jesus and the disciples. All of the synoptists state that it was only after Jesus had been teaching for some time that the question of food arose and that it was the disciples who raised the matter with him (implying that Jesus was so engrossed in teaching spiritual truths that he was oblivious of the practicalities of such a crowd finding something to eat in that remote area). The writers never imagined that their words would ever be regarded as being the inerrant word of God where every detail would be examined and questioned. They were not writing evidence for a court of law, they were recalling an experience. It was nine miles by road from Capernaum to Bethsaida Julias and obviously the great majority of the people would not run - not five thousand of them. Probably some enthusiastic younger men had done so and they would probably pick up others from towns on the way, but by far the majority would still be some way away. With regard to the disciples raising the problem of how they might feed everyone, John would be aware of what the other evangelists had written and no doubt they were correct. However, the majority of the disciples may not have been aware of Jesus' conversation with Philip. The little group had got away to relax; probably they were

sitting or lying back on the hillside in groups of two or three, slightly scattered from each other. Philip may well have been sitting next to Jesus who sees the vast crowd approaching and immediately foresees the problem of providing food for such a number. It isn't simply a matter of money - why should Jesus and the twelve be held responsible for hosting them? No one, least of all the crowd themselves, would expect it. Probably each would have enough money to buy food for him or herself. No, the problem was where could they buy it? Even today with deep freeze storage, what village could cope with a totally unexpected crowd of 5,000 suddenly wanting to be fed?

So Jesus quietly asks Philip, where are we going to buy bread for them all? Was Jesus really implying that he and his twelve friends should be financially responsible for feeding them? or was it an inclusive 'we' i.e. "where are we all going to be able to buy enough bread for so many of us?" Be that as it may, the emphasis is surely not on the sum of money involved but on the 'where'. John then adds that Jesus asked Philip this to test him and not because he was actually at a loss, for he already knew what he would do. What does that actually imply? Did Jesus know already that in the crowd there was a lad with his lunch which he would use to multiply into enough for all? It is not necessary to assume such detail; simply that Jesus trusted that there would be some food amongst the crowd and that his Father would use it to feed everyone.

7-9. Philip concentrates on the cost, ignoring the 'where'. He estimates that it would cost more than 200 denarii to buy enough bread for such a number. A denarius was the standard day's wage and so that would amount to well over 6 months pay for a workman. After this discussion between Jesus and Philip we must assume that, following the report of the synoptists, Jesus embarked on a teaching session for the crowd. This went on for some time and as the evening drew on, the disciples came to Jesus and suggested that he should dismiss the crowd so that they might go into the surrounding villages and try to buy food for themselves. But Jesus said, "You feed them." Mark records that one of them said, "are we to buy two hundred denarii worth of bread?" foreshortening John's more detailed account. The others record the finding of the boy with the loaves and fishes but, again, it is John who provides the detail that it was Andrew who found him. Andrew is so often shown to be bringing people to Jesus - first Simon, his brother; here the young lad and then the Greeks (12:22). Andrew comments that five small loaves and two small fish are hardly going to supply so great a need.

There is a lesson here. As we look out on the needs of a world which has moved so far from God we may be so overwhelmed with the task of doing anything about it that we give up and do nothing. But consider the task facing Jesus. Following his baptism he went out immediately into the wilderness and, from the nature of the temptations he faced, it seems that he was considering how to accomplish his work. He was to offer salvation to all people of all time and bring in the kingdom of God. He rejected the sensational and concentrated his efforts on the Jewish nation and decided to work with a very small group of disciples, to teach them and send them out to spread the truth throughout the world. From a human point of view it seems ridiculous - twelve very ordinary men to bring in the kingdom on earth. But it worked! Men may reject the truth, but basically the truth is available world wide. One boy's lunch to feed five thousand, but offered to God it was enough. However, God needed the lunch. Right at the beginning of Genesis God gave man dominion over the earth - it was his plan that he should rule the earth through mankind. Although mankind has failed, God has not; he still operates through us - supremely Jesus had to become man for us to be saved. We have the privilege of co-operating with God in bringing in the kingdom and God does not work on earth without our co-operation. God needed the lunch.

10-13. Jesus asks the disciples to make the people sit down and John adds the detail that there was plenty of grass there - surely the touch of an eyewitness. Commentators have pointed out that there is a grassy plain near Bethsaida Julias adjoining the shore of the sea called El-Batiah. John says that there were five thousand men; Matthew adds that there were women and children in addition.

With regard to the miracle itself there is a view which holds that there was no literal multiplication of the loaves and fishes. What happened was that the great majority of people had brought at least some food with them - it is unlikely that they would set out on such a journey whose outcome was so uncertain without

bringing some nourishment. However, no one knew if others had brought anything and so all were embarrassed to be the first to produce their food. However, when Jesus took the young lad's lunch and publicly blessed it, this released everyone else into producing their own food and probably sharing with any who had not brought a supply. This in itself is a miracle, it is claimed, to release people into being part of a loving, sharing community. This may be so, but there can be little doubt that that is not what John is seeking to imply, he could easily have given this explanation if it were the truth. He obviously intends us to believe that the crowd were fed, and fully fed, on five barley loaves and two fishes and that, in addition, twelve baskets were filled with the discarded scraps.

14-15. As a result of this miracle, some in the crowd begin to say that Jesus must be the prophet spoken about by Moses (Deut. 18:15) (a comment unlikely to be inspired if the 'miracle' were simply that people were encouraged to share the food they had brought with them) and this rapidly spreads amongst them all. In their enthusiasm they want to take him, by force if necessary, and make him their king. No doubt they intend that he should lead them against the hated Roman occupying power. What a champion to have - one who can work miracles, who could withstand him? Strangely enough, they had discovered a truth but then totally misappropriated it; Jesus is a king but his kingdom is not of this world. We each need to make him king of our lives but that means he controls us; we do not control him. We may think we understand that, but how many of our prayers are actually asking God to do what we want rather than asking him to make us more willing to do what he wants? We fall into the same error as this crowd. Jesus knew what they were about so he dismisses the crowd and sends the disciples ahead of him by boat to Bethsaida (Mark 6.45) while he withdraws by himself up the hill to pray.

16-21. Now we meet an interesting situation. Matthew and Mark record, as does John, that while the disciples were in the boat a storm blew up, but they put a different emphasis on what happened. They make much more of the miracle of Jesus walking on the water than John; indeed, Matthew (and he alone) adds the important incident of Peter also walking on the water. Were we to have only John's version we might not recognise it as a miracle at all. The words he uses to describe Jesus walking on the water, he uses again in 21:1 when the meaning is clearly that he was walking along the shore. Whereas Matthew and Mark record that Jesus actually got into the boat, John states only that they were willing to take him into it with the possible, even probable, implication that he did not in fact get in because at that moment the boat grounded on the edge of the lake and they realised that they had arrived at their destination. In the darkness and the severity of the storm they had not realised how near to the shore they were.

However, John would have been aware that the story of Peter walking on the waves and then sinking, was in circulation and he is not setting forth his version as a correction (his reference to their "being willing" to take Jesus into the boat can justifiably be taken to mean that they wouldn't have wanted a ghost but when they realised it was Jesus they were happy to do so). The point he wants to emphasise is not so much the fact that Jesus could walk on water (because whilst that may illustrate the remarkable power of Jesus to do unusual things, that is of little practical use now that he is no longer on earth in the flesh), but rather that the presence of Jesus brought peace - and that is still so today. He also draws attention to the fact that immediately Jesus was on board they reached their destination; and he leaves us to work out the spiritual applications of that for ourselves.

22-24. Although Jesus had dismissed the crowd, many of them had not set out on the journey back to Capernaum and its surrounding area in the dark. In the morning there is no sign of Jesus, yet they know that he had gone up the hill and the disciples had gone off in the only boat. By this time some boats from Tiberias, the major town on the lake situated on the opposite (western) edge, had arrived. John gives no explanation of why they were there; perhaps they had taken shelter in the storm or maybe news had reached the owners that a large crowd from Capernaum had gathered on the plain at Bethsaida Julias and there was possible business to be had. The crowd are mystified about what has happened to Jesus but assume, correctly, that he has returned to Capernaum and so they get into the boats to be taken there rather than walk around the top of the lake, as they had done the day before.

25-27. As soon as they land they look for Jesus and, finding him, immediately ask when he had reached Capernaum, this obviously embraces the question 'how?' But Jesus will not be diverted into an explanation which would simply enhance their opinion of him as a wonder-worker fulfilling their expectations of a crusading Messiah. Instead he challenges them with a matter that is always in the forefront of his mind - the kingdom of God. He raises it, of course, in connection with the miracle of the bread and fishes which has caused their idolisation. They have not understood the significance of the sign because their thoughts and aims are confined to this life and this world. How convenient not to have to work for a living; food can be miraculously supplied, so life can be transformed. Yes, life can be transformed by Jesus, but in a far more fundamental manner than they appreciate. It is not simply how we live out this life that is transformed by him; that is transformed because life itself is transformed into eternal life.

This highlights the distinction between the natural man and the spiritual man, to use Paul's terminology. If our minds are set on this world then, even if we have a belief that there is a future life, all our interest and motivation will be devoted to gaining advantage in this life. It is only if we are utterly convinced that this life is but a preparation (and such a brief preparation) for eternity that we will put it in its right perspective. This is not to advocate a useless otherworldliness - no one could accuse Jesus of not being deeply involved in the affairs of everyday life; why, he had just fed five thousand! - but all our actions are to be performed in the light of their eternal significance. Of course, it is difficult to live our lives in the conviction of a truth we cannot see or prove; this world is all too real. In our natural human state, as Jesus said, we cannot see the kingdom (3:3). In the words of this passage we can sense the hurt that Jesus feels in seeing the situation of these people whom he loves so dearly. He had spent so much of the previous day talking to them about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11) and here they are thinking only of the miraculous provision of food without appreciating what the sign implied. It is a heart cry from Jesus - "O, don't devote so much time to things which are so temporary, set your minds on the eternal nourishment which I am able to give you if only you will receive it."

Once again, Jesus uses the term Son of Man of himself (cf. 1:51). He is identified with us but he claims to know what he is talking about by stating "On him the Father has set his seal of approval." A seal is a sign of ownership and authenticity; attached to a document it gives authority. Jesus is claiming, therefore, to represent the Father; he does indeed know what he is talking about and it is the truth.

28. The people pick up the word 'work' which Jesus has used in v.27 and ask him what they must do to work the works of God. This is commendable in the sense that apparently they are interested in doing what God requires, but they have totally missed what Jesus is seeking to lead them into. Their thoughts are still confined to this life - "If it is God who is able to give us this bread which will literally feed us day by day without us having to work for it, then let's find out how we can please him so that he will give it to us."

29. Jesus persists and answers that the work of God is to believe in himself. There is no conflict here with the truth that we are saved by faith and not works. Faith is not a 'good work' in the sense that if we have it God will regard us as deserving and will reward us by giving us eternal life. Faith is not a work it is a channel through which we receive him and all he gives; it is simply opening ourselves to him. Perhaps there is a truth that we have to exert some determination in maintaining our faith, in continually renewing our decision to go God's way and not the way of the world; but that is simply keeping the channel open, not working to earn our salvation. Spiritual truths have to be expressed in words for we have no other way of conveying them, but words are inadequate and cannot always be taken literally. That is so with the word 'work' in vv. 27 and 29. The concern of Jesus is this: "You spend so much time and effort on this life which is so brief, if only you would devote yourselves with equal determination to what is eternal."

30-31. The people then ask for some sign of authentication; the 'seal' of v.27 is not visible. Of course, they have already been given a sign - the feeding of the 5000: why, it was this which had made them seek him out. However, by distilling 'working the works of God' to belief in himself, he was making claims beyond even that of Moses who had also claimed he had been sent by God. Admittedly Jesus had performed a miracle in feeding so many but he had had the 5 loaves and the two fishes to work on, under Moses the people had been given manna direct from heaven.

32-33. Although the people referred to their ancestors eating manna in the desert and had not mentioned Moses by name, they were obviously comparing him with Jesus and so Jesus brings the comparison into the open. We may paraphrase his argument as follows: "You must understand that Moses was only an intermediary, he did not give you (your ancestors) the bread which came from heaven, it was God. I am in such relationship with him that he is my Father and he is giving you the true bread, not manna, which comes from heaven. The true bread of God is a person who comes from heaven and is able to bring heavenly (that is, eternal) life to the world."

34-35. Just as the woman at the well had asked Jesus for the living water which would eternally quench her thirst (4:15) so now the people ask him to give them this bread of which he speaks. Jesus then reveals the truth to which he has been leading them, "I am the bread of life." This is the first of his "I AM" sayings. It is commonly agreed that bread is the staple diet. However many other foods and delicacies there may be, a person can live on bread alone. There is a further point. If a person is hungry, he cannot concentrate nor, eventually, will he have strength; he will search for food and, if he is ravenous, the search will dominate his mind, everything else becomes secondary to the need to find food: such is the body's need. But the human soul has needs also and if these are not met it can lead to psychological distress. As the body falls prey to sickness and disease, so the soul exhibits dis-ease in the form of depression and despair. Unless we know why we have life, what we are here for, we can never know whether we have succeeded. We cannot know if we have fulfilled our purpose if we do not know what that purpose is. Without that there is an internal restlessness. By stating that he is the bread of life Jesus is claiming to meet the deepest need within each of us. When we find him we find ourselves; we know who we are and why we are. We may often fail to be what we have been designed to be, but we have a purpose and a means to fulfil that purpose; and, when we fail, a means of restoration. So, says Jesus, he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. To prevaricate by saying that bread cannot quench thirst, is not worth any discussion; anyone who argues thus has not even begun to grasp what Jesus is about. (See also note on v.48)

Again we see the inadequacy of words to convey the full depth of spiritual truth. 'Come' and 'believe' are used in a special sense. When a consultant tells a patient, "I want you to come into hospital," so much more is implied than walking through the doors. He is asking that the patient should put him or herself into the hands of the medical staff for them to probe in a variety of ways to bring to light what is wrong. When the consultant then says, "I need to operate on you," he is asking the patient to trust or believe in him, that he will cut out what is diseased and restore health. That is what Jesus is asking of each person in the crowd and of us - come and trust.

36-37. There is a sense of sadness in the ensuing comment of Jesus that they have seen him but still do not believe. They have asked him for a sign, but what more can he do? Already they have seen enough to encourage over five thousand of them to follow him and walk some eight or more miles round the lake, to spend the day listening to him, to watch as he fed them all on the lunch of one young lad, with baskets full of left-overs gathered up, and then to search for him back in Capernaum; all this, apart from other signs which they have seen or of which they have heard. There was no other sign to be given then or today; we all have to look at Jesus and decide for ourselves "who is this man?" It would be easy to attribute a sense of frustration to Jesus at their unwillingness to believe were it not for his observation that "All that the Father gives me will come to me" The corollary of that will follow in v.44; "No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Here, of course, we enter the minefield of the apparent conflict between predestination by God of our salvation and our freewill to choose or reject it. Theologians have debated this down the ages and no doubt will continue to do so. Scripture clearly teaches both truths and both are proclaimed within these few verses. Jesus is obviously appealing to the crowd to exercise their free will choice to come and to believe (35) and he implies that they have a responsibility for the choice they make (36); yet it is clear that only those whom the Father draws will come but all of those will come (44 & 37). Difficult as it is with our understanding in this life to reconcile the two, it is, nevertheless, confirmed in our experience; undoubtedly we exercised choice in responding to the call of Jesus to follow him yet as we mature in him we realise that we have been chosen. We confirm the truth which John set out at the beginning of this gospel. "Yet to all who received him, to those who

believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (1:12) We choose to believe and then discover we have been born of God.

Jesus then makes a promise, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." What an encouragement that is. If we approach other people, asking them for help or with an apology for something we have done, we can never be sure how we will be received. We make ourselves vulnerable and they may reject or even attack us. That is not so with Jesus. It may be that we believe ourselves beyond redemption, we have done something so terrible that no one could possibly accept us; or perhaps we have been accorded so little worth or even despised by others that we assume God must have the same attitude towards us as they. Here Jesus tells us in advance what his attitude will be to anyone and everyone who comes to him - whoever comes (see note on v.35 above about the meaning of the word 'come').

38-40. The reason why the statement in the previous verse is true is that Jesus is fulfilling not his own will but his Father's (not, of course, that his will is something different). He is revealing the Father's heart towards mankind. Jesus will not reject any who come to him because the Father does not reject them. Indeed it is the Father's will that Jesus shall not lose any whom he gives to him. Then Jesus introduces a phrase he will repeat three more times in this passage, "I will raise them up at the last day." There is a balance between vv. 38 and 39; Jesus came down to raise us up.

These verses raise two issues - first, the doctrine of perseverance (once we have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord it is impossible to fall away) and secondly, what happens when we die?

Jesus says that it is the Father's will that he, Jesus, should lose none of those he, the Father, has given to him. If the Father's will is fulfilled therefore, then "once saved, always saved." The problem about that is that in practice we do see people who have committed their lives to the Lord, work for him, are instrumental in bringing others to faith, then reject all that they have stood for and claim that God does not exist. This is not to refer to those who believe and then fail - perhaps sinning heinously; for we all continue to fail, and there is the opportunity to repent, confess and be restored. Rather it is those who believe and then deny the truth they once believed. Whilst this passage does appear to teach the doctrine of perseverance, it has to be set alongside other passages such as this - "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (Heb. 6:6) This clearly implies that it is possible to fall away. Those who hold strongly to the doctrine will claim that whilst it may appear that those who fall away were true believers and were given by the Father to the Son, in fact they never were. This reasoning preserves the doctrine but raises a difficulty in that we can never be sure of anyone's faith, not even our own; and this conflicts with the statement in v.37 that Jesus will not turn away any who come to him, because that would imply that some may come to him but he will, in fact, lose them because they have not been given him by the Father.

It is difficult to solve this problem but perhaps the solution lies along the following lines. The Greek word translated as 'will' in v. 39 is *Thelema* which can also mean 'wish' or 'desire'. Paul writes to Timothy: "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth," (1 Tim. 2:4) and Peter writes: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). From these two verses we learn that it is God's will that everyone should be saved and that none should perish. However, other Scriptures make it clear that by no means everyone will be saved. God has given us free will and he does not force his will upon us - for then we would be only robots. The doctrine of perseverance, like that of predestination, involves the coming together of God's will and our will.

The other matter raised here is the question of what happens when we die. Jesus says that he will raise the believer on the last day, so what has happened to the faithful who have already died? and what will happen to us when we die if the 'last day' has not yet come? Scripture often refers to death as 'falling asleep', and there

are some who hold that this implies that the dead are in a state of limbo similar to sleep - alive but unaware. At death we lose consciousness and the next thing we know will be the resurrection. However, Paul writes; "I desire to depart and be with Christ" (Philp. 1:23) which hardly conveys that he expects to be unconscious or unaware. Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with him that day in paradise and there is also this strange record: "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (Matt. 27:52/3). This implies that when Jesus rose, the faithful down the years who had died were also raised; so what is this reference to being raised 'on the last day'? It seems that prior to the resurrection of Jesus all the dead went to sheol or Hades, a place of the departed. In Scripture this is depicted as a place of shadows and limbo. At his resurrection, however, the faithful under the old covenant were released. Perhaps those who die now as unbelievers still go to this 'place'; while believers go, as Paul states, to be with Christ. However, it seems that they are not yet in that final planned state of heaven. The writer to the Hebrews sets out a list of the great heroes of the Old Testament but ends by stating: "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb 11:40). Or, as the Revised English Bible has it, "because, with us in mind, God had made a better plan, that only with us should they reach perfection." It seems that the Lord is gathering his own to himself at the gates of heaven and when the last believer is gathered, then we all go in together. Of course, all this is surmise and it could well be that because the dimension of time is confined to this life and is totally different from eternity, when we die we pass from one to the other and the consummation which God desires will be already realised. We just do not know, but may trust him who does all things well.

One thing is abundantly clear - there will be a 'last day'. Evil will be abolished and total goodness will prevail. This inevitably involves judgement but, as Scripture illustrates so consistently, ultimately we judge ourselves by how we have chosen to live. God's judgement on the last day will be a confirmation of our choice. Fortunately, it does depend on choice rather than achievement. We all fail to be what we were created to be but some have no concern about that, they live only for themselves, making themselves the centre of their universe. Others long to be the person they know they could be, recognising that God is the centre and seek to take their place in the light of that knowledge. Conscious of their failure they are dissatisfied, but recognise the truth of the teaching of Jesus and make him Lord of their lives. They have chosen to be what he designed them to be. They may continue to fail (although, hopefully, their failures become less and less as they walk with him), but his will for them and their will for themselves coincide; they dare not trust themselves to succeed but depend upon him to bring them through. They rely upon his promise that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life and he will raise them up on the last day (40)

41-42. The Jews (that is those who hold some official position, probably within the Synagogue, and hold to 'the party line') begin to murmur or whisper among themselves over his claim to be the bread which came down from heaven. What is he trying to say? that he arrived on earth in some supernatural manner? Why, he is the son of Joseph and Mary, whom several of them know well; so how can he claim to have 'come down from heaven'? Nowhere does John refer to the virgin birth. He does not deny it, of course, but he is interested in a deeper truth. He is not so concerned with the mechanics of how the Word became flesh but rather what or who it is who became flesh. So John's record of Jesus claiming to be the bread which came down from heaven is the deeper equivalent of the virgin birth proclaimed by Matthew and Luke.

43-45. Jesus does not attempt to answer their over-literal understanding of what he is seeking to convey - how he can be both born of Mary (and, so they suppose, of Joseph) and have come down from heaven, but falls back on what he has already explained; no one will or can come to him (which involves understanding) unless the Father draws him (37). (For a commentary on v.44 see the notes on v.37.) To be able to understand spiritual truth, the human spirit must be active and that only happens when a person is born again of the Holy Spirit, for what is born of the flesh is flesh; only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (3:6) and such spiritual birth is the work of God (1:13). As Paul explains: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14) To press home this truth Jesus refers to the prophets (actually to Isaiah 54:13) that "They will be taught by God." However, having proclaimed the predestination aspect, Jesus balances this with the need for us to exercise our free will and states that it is the person who listens to the Father and then takes what he has

heard into himself (learns from him) who will have been drawn to Jesus. There is a deep truth here. We listen to and learn from the Father, working on us through his Holy Spirit, but we are drawn first to Jesus, not directly to the Father. The whole of this passage is about Jesus being the bread of life, we cannot by-pass Jesus to reach the Father. We are to know the Father, but “no one comes to the Father except through me.” (14:6)

46-47. However close we may draw to God in this life, however deeply we may enjoy his presence, we know only in part, not as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12). (See note on 1:18.) But Jesus, having come from God, knows him in a way we cannot. We do not comprehend what we mean if we ask what Jesus ‘remembered’ of his life with the Father before his incarnation, because we do not understand what the incarnation really involved. Nor can we know what it means to say that he had ‘seen’ the Father: how do you ‘see’ someone who has no physical body? Such words are inadequate, but they are not meaningless. Jesus, and Jesus alone, was in such relationship with the Father that he could offer to others - to us - a sharing of that relationship. To believe what Jesus says and to accept that offer and thus to enter into a relationship with God, the source of all life, is to partake of his eternal life.

48-51. Once again Jesus states, “I am the bread of life” (see note on v. 35). Because no one has seen God we cannot comprehend his fullness. Jesus is the most comprehensive revelation of God we have - “He has made him known.” (1:18). But he has to explain this fullness by disbursing the revelation in various ways, using the ‘I AM’ sayings: I am the light, the door, the life etc. Yet they all stem from and point to that which John was seeking to convey in his introduction - that which existed in the beginning, the ultimate reality and source from which everything sprang. It is all part of God expressing himself (see note on ‘Logos’ 1:1). It is because Jesus is part of that ultimate reality, that first cause, he is himself life. So he is that which sustains life, he is the ‘Bread of Life’. The manna in the desert was not of that ilk; it was provided miraculously but it was purely physical and sustained only physical life, and physical life comes to an end, so those who ate it died in the natural order of events. The bread which Jesus claims to be is in essence the very life of God (it comes down from heaven), and by ‘coming’ and ‘believing’ (35) we are able to partake of this bread and thus live for ever.

52. Just as Nicodemus could not understand how a man could re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again, and just as the woman at the well did not understand how Jesus could draw water providing eternal life, so the Jews who listened to Jesus speaking of the bread of life could not grasp how he could give of his flesh for them to eat; but are we able to understand better? Jesus is building on his call to ‘come’ and to ‘believe’. Perhaps we can grasp something of what he is seeking to convey from the realm of art. We may read a poem, study a painting, listen to music or see a film or a play which will move us deeply. Something which the author experienced and felt has entered into us and become part of our experience. We can never be the same again because that experience has become part of us. The more profound the experience, the greater the effect. To feed on the flesh of Jesus is more than standing back and analysing what he has said or even who he is; it is so to identify with him that we not only understand how he sees things, we see them that way too, at least to some extent. This is, of course, a revolutionary experience which we have never known before. Because it is an experience it is deeply personal and no one can either have it or do it for us. They may lead us to it and seek to explain the experience they have had but no more. It is a relationship between Jesus and us as an individual. Something of him has entered into us - we have ‘eaten of his flesh’.

53-59. There is another aspect to Jesus’ use of the term ‘flesh’ which must not be overlooked “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (1:14). In his introduction John explained that it is in his humanity that Christ gave himself to us. He entered into our experience that we might enter into his and become co-heirs with him (Rom. 8:17). Jesus now adds a further condition - we have to drink his blood. To the Jews listening to him this would be even more horrific than it is to us. Their law was clear, “But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.” (Deut. 12:23/24) Theologians disagree about what Jesus meant by ‘eating his flesh and drinking his blood’. Some claim that it refers solely to the sacrifice of himself on the cross as the perfect sin offering; the ‘blood poured out’, is simply the sign of his death i.e. the life had left the body. That is to say, we receive only the benefit of his death in the remission of our sins; there is no implication that we receive the life of Jesus into us by drinking his blood. (We do receive his life by other means - e.g. by believing and abiding in

him - but not by drinking his blood.) Such commentators would probably not agree with the exegesis of v.52 above. However, even allowing for the fact that it is all highly figurative and symbolic (even if the symbolism is also effective), and there is no possibility or intention of us literally drinking his blood, it seems that Jesus is making a deliberate contrast here. The very fact that the law forbade the drinking of the blood because the life was in it, indeed it was the life, adds significance to the directive of Jesus that they were to drink his blood. There can be no doubt that Jesus was referring to his death (cf. v.51) but surely he is thinking of more than the reconciliation that that would bring between mankind and our Creator. He is inviting us to participate not only in his death, but in his life as v.53 makes clear.

Nowhere does John refer to the institution of the Holy Communion at the last supper, although each of the synoptists does so. It cannot be that John is unaware of it, with the command of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me." Nor can it be that John discounts it; he would never ignore a commandment of the Lord. As so often with him, he does not simply repeat what the synoptists record but he goes deeper to explain the significance of their teaching. It is often asked whether this passage is John's equivalent to the record of the institution of the Holy Communion. Perhaps that is the wrong question. That service would have been part of the life of the Church then as it is now and, no doubt, John partook of it; but he is seeking to reveal the true meaning of the teaching of Jesus about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. The Holy Communion is a clear and important focus for this but it is not some automatic means of receiving him; it must involve the spiritual reception of the Lord, not simply the physical reception of the elements, and John was seeking to convey that truth. However, the Holy Communion is not the only means of feeding on the flesh and drinking of the blood of Jesus, because we need to be doing that every moment. Our lives are to be lived out in the light and the strength of our Lord. He died not only so that he might save us but that his life might continue through us who form his body on earth today, the Church. "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. [John 12:24]" The death of the kernel produces seeds with life in them.

With regard to v. 56 - "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him," Jesus is to say the same in his teaching about the vine (15:4). It is to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16): it is both passive and active. We allow Jesus to own us, we submit to him, but also we consciously seek to understand his will and use our wills to will it. Immediately Jesus reiterates the constant desire of his own will - to submit to his Father: it is the Father's will that must prevail. He knows that he has life on this earth not for his own sake or benefit, but for the Father's and he is sustained by the Father. He may have life in himself, but it is only because the Father has granted it to be so (5:26). Indeed, although he has always existed (there never was when the Son was not), nevertheless he sprang from the Father: he was 'begotten'. So we must feed on him, Jesus, if our life is to be sustained, because we do not have life in us apart from him - another truth that is to be repeated in the teaching about the vine (15:4-8).

Throughout the whole of the report of this teaching of Jesus, John has in mind the distinction between living out our lives on a purely physical and materialist level, which he would regard as no more than existence, and that quality of life which draws its power and purpose from the eternal. It is to recognise a whole dimension which is not understood except by the human spirit when it is brought alive by the Holy Spirit. ("I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 3:2) This is the bread which sustains life in that eternity, so those who feed on it have eternal life now and, because it is eternal, physical death will not be able to hold them. Those who ate the manna in the wilderness still died in the course of time because the manna was itself physical (even though it was a miraculous provision) and sustained only physical life. But he who feeds on Christ will live for ever.

John mentions that this teaching was given in the synagogue in Capernaum. Whether Jesus had moved into the synagogue during the course of the conversation (cf. v. 25) or whether the major part of it formed his teaching a few days later, prompted by the initial exchange, we do not know.

60-62. The reference here to disciples embraces a far larger group than the twelve (66). A whole crowd had followed him from the other side of the lake as would-be supporters. But now they find his teaching difficult

(disagreeable, harsh or stern). No doubt they had progressed in their understanding beyond the literal "how can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (52). Maybe that still caused a problem but the further elucidation of vv. 53-60 would have encouraged them to appreciate that Jesus was in some sense speaking figuratively. They were beginning to hear but didn't like what they heard. It was difficult enough that Jesus was claiming to be their means of life but there was the further claim that he had come down from heaven. If this was what caused offence, what would they think if they were to see the Son of Man ascend back to heaven? Of course, this was no help to them at that time because Jesus was standing before them simply as another human being. He was musing on the future. Would they then believe? The problem, of course, was that only those who already believed would witness the ascension. However, there is a very real truth here. The affirmation of Christ's life and teaching is the resurrection and ascension; without that all would be unsubstantiated theory.

63-65. Once again Jesus refers to the necessity of being born again of the Spirit of God (cf. 3:6). Because he lives in it, it is so clear to him that there is this spiritual realm which is eternal but humankind in our natural state does not appreciate that it exists. We are like people living always in a house without windows or doors totally unaware of the vast expanse of countryside which surrounds it. Jesus enters that house and tries to convince the occupants of the outside reality. The words he has just spoken to these would-be disciples reveal this reality and offer the life to be lived in it.

However, Jesus knows that some of those who hear are unwilling to take the step of believing that what he claims is the truth. The word 'some' gives the impression that it is a minority who do not believe; in fact the majority - maybe even all (66) - are about to desert him except for the twelve - but perhaps some of those were to come to faith in the future. John comments that Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe. This is more than a general understanding of human nature, it implies a spiritual gift of discernment - even knowing the one who was to betray him and knowing it, says John, from the beginning. Once again we face the problem of election and predestination. It is a mystery but a fact that it does not depend solely on our free will; only those whom the Father calls will come to Jesus (cf. 37, 44 and 65).

There is also the problem of why Jesus chose Judas, knowing that he would betray him. Was he predestined to betray Jesus and, if so, can he be held responsible for doing so? Some light is thrown on this - "The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." [Luke 22:22] So Judas is held responsible for his actions. But why did Jesus knowingly invite a traitor to join the inner circle of twelve? Of course, we cannot be certain but one way of approaching such problems as this is to ask what the situation would have been had a different course been adopted. In this case one consequence would have been that it would have appeared that Jesus was taken by surprise and, possibly, that his arrest and crucifixion were unintended. As it is we can see Jesus deciding as an act of will to walk the way prepared for him by the Father. It was a deliberate act and he knew exactly who would betray him. Had it been us in that position it would have coloured our relationship with Judas. How could we have treated him exactly as we treated the other eleven? But Jesus showed no such discrimination and even went the extra mile in offering Judas the sop of bread at the last supper. Although this had the effect of hardening his heart, that surely was not the Lord's intention. It was a last minute appeal, showing that Jesus knew of the plan but still offered love. We need to bear in mind that Judas was sent out with the other disciples, two by two; someone must have been his partner, and there is no reason to believe that he did not preach and heal with the same success as any of the others, even though he was a thief long before he was a betrayer (12:6).

66. In John's record this is the turning point. Until now, although Jesus had met opposition, he was attracting more and more followers; it was a growing movement. Now, John records, many turned back. Jesus was not interested in forming a political movement nor in attracting personal popularity. His purpose is described in a variety of ways; he came to give life, to bring people to the Father, to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth, he came to serve and to make whole (which includes salvation). He desired his followers to be clear-sighted; we live in a fallen world and his disciples must follow him in overcoming that world - a task which would involve hardship, misunderstanding, suffering and possibly even death. Although he eschewed personal popularity he did demand personal relationship with himself; indeed, it was the depth of this

relationship expressed as feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood, which caused many to turn back now. They went back to their former way of life in both belief and behaviour.

67-69. The majority of versions translate v.67 as a straight question, "Do you want to leave?" but in the original there is an implied negative and the N.I.V. is correct - "You don't want to leave too, do you?" Nevertheless, this verse carries perhaps more pathos than any other in this Gospel. A human lover will do almost anything to prevent his or her beloved leaving; but Jesus will have nothing less than our love offered willingly and freely. He allows even the twelve to desert him too, if that is their choice. Peter answers for them all. At first sight his words could seem to be a backhanded compliment - "we would if we could, but there isn't anyone else we can go to." In fact, his full statement makes it clear that he is saying that having met Jesus, no one else can satisfy them. He shows that they, the twelve, have understood, at least to some degree, his claim that "the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." (63) Then he goes on to reveal the growth in their understanding of who he is in himself - the Holy One of God.

Peter does not use the title 'Messiah', although that is how his brother Andrew had first described Jesus to him (1:41). Perhaps this is John's equivalent record of the declaration Peter made at Caesarea Philippi when he did recognise Jesus as the Messiah (Mk. 8:29; Matt. 16:14). There, the question from Jesus, "Who do men say that I am.. who do you say that I am?" would encourage Peter to consider the specific role Jesus fulfilled. Here the previous discourse would encourage him to think of his spiritual heritage.

70-71. The question Jesus had asked, "Will you also leave?" and Peter's reply imply choice, the exercise of free will. Jesus now balances that with the other side of the mystery of conversion, they chose him because he had first chosen them. Even so one of them was a devil (cf. also the note on v. 65). Although the term 'devil' is usually and rightly applied to Satan as the devil, the word actually means a slanderer or accuser. As many have pointed out, what was so terrible about Judas Iscariot (John carefully distinguishes him from the other Judas who was one of the twelve) is that he was not one of those who 'went back' and dissociated himself from Jesus; he stayed as one of the band of intimate friends and worked against Jesus from within - John stresses the appalling fact that it was one of the twelve who betrayed him. It was not long before he became a tool for the devil to use (13:3) and finally to enter (13:27).

## Chapter 7

At the opening of Ch. 5 I mentioned the probability that Chapter 6 should precede it; probably Ch. 7 vv. 15-24 have also become misplaced and should follow on immediately from the end of Ch. 5. This would make greater sense than where they are. In 5.45 Jesus speaks of what Moses wrote; it would be as natural for v.15 to follow this as to follow 7.14 and it is more natural for v.23 to relate to Ch. 5 which is to do with healing a man on the Sabbath. If this is so, then the rebuke to the Jewish leaders in 15-24 gives a clearer reason for the statement in 7:1 that Jesus retreated to Galilee to avoid being captured and executed before the appointed time.

1-5. The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three great feasts of the year. The comments of his brothers must be considered in the light of v. 5 - they did not believe in Jesus. Just who were these 'brothers'. Some would say that this is a term with a wider connotation than our use of it in the west. In Africa even today a 'brother' can be anyone from the same village. Others would say that they were his older step brothers from a previous marriage of his father, Joseph. While others still would say they were younger brothers born to Mary after Jesus. What does it mean that his brothers did not believe in him? They knew he had been working miracles, they could hardly deny that when crowds attested to it. Indeed, they admit it (4), but they do not believe his claim that he has come from God. His brothers are the ones most likely to have the greatest difficulty in believing. They would have watched him grow up and shared with him in the home; no doubt Jesus was most unusual being sinless, but he was fully human and, even if he had supernatural gifts, there was no reason for them to believe he was in some sense the Son of God. So they encouraged him to go public and exploit his gifts. They wanted him to become even more famous and have the widest possible audience. To them he was a miracle worker rather than a Saviour.

6-13. Jesus explains that it is not the right time for him (6 & 8). He means more by this than the right time for going to the feast. He is thinking of his martyrdom. He knows what the end is to be, but he will determine its time under the will of his Father. Were he to go up with his brothers and with everyone else travelling to Jerusalem from Galilee, he would have been pushed to the fore and easily identified by the Jews who, he knew, would be on the watch for him (11). There is a 'time' set for him (when he will die for the world) but there is no such time for his brothers or his disciples. The world has no reason to hate them (although later, following his ascension, it will when they also challenge its ways). Just by being who he is and proclaiming the truth, Jesus is a threat to the established order of things - the way that we all live our lives. Righteousness is always a threat to evil. Jesus then states that he will not go up to the feast yet. Because some of the ancient manuscripts do not have the word 'yet', some translations omit it and that has caused some commentators to accuse Jesus of duplicity - he says he is not going to the feast but as soon as his brothers have departed, he does go. However, the following verses reveal that Jesus planned to slip into Jerusalem quietly when the city was already crowded. No doubt the authorities had hoped that if he came at all he would do so very obviously and well before the feast began when they would be able to deal with him, probably claiming he was stirring up political trouble. Jesus was well aware they wanted to kill him. As it was they were still keeping an eye open in case he appeared.

Even though Jesus was (apparently) not present, he was a talking point amongst the people who, as today, were divided in their views of him. But they were aware of the extreme hostility of their leaders towards him and, being afraid of them, did not speak openly.

14. When the feast is well underway and the Jewish authorities were probably less alert, assuming that Jesus was not coming, he goes to the temple courts and begins to teach. He was not at the head of some crowd who were championing him, but sitting quietly teaching. It would have been very difficult for the authorities to have arrested him for that.

15. The question of the Jews is literally, "How did this man learn letters?" that is, learn to read. If, as already explained, this verse follows on from Ch. 5 v.47, they would be asking "How does he know in such detail what

Moses wrote? Isn't he a village carpenter? so where did he learn?" This is more than amazement; in Jewish culture a Rabbi had to quote previous Rabbis, rather as in the English legal system lawyers quote previous cases and the decisions arising from them. The Jews here were accusing Jesus of having no authority behind him other than his own.

16-17. Jesus replies that he is not speaking on his own authority - he has a teacher, the one who sent him, God himself. He then makes a profound statement which applies as much today as it did then. The way to discover the truth of God is to do his will. The natural human way is to analyse a proposition and then, if it seems feasible, to explore or adopt it. In the spiritual realm obedience comes first; as we obey so we discover not simply that it works (it does, but that is the consequence of a prior reality) but that we have an assurance within us that this is so, this is true. We recognise the truth within our spirit. Paul gives an example of this, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." [Rom 8:16] The Holy Spirit confirms a truth within our own spirit. Jesus is claiming that what he teaches is not a product of his own reasoning, it is a revelation of the eternal reality which lies behind creation, that is God himself. John is back again to the theme which underlies the whole of his gospel and which he set out in its introduction (1:1-18).

18. Jesus continues his reasoning that a person who does speak on his own authority obviously does it for his own benefit - power, reputation or advancement; but if he is seeking only to honour the one who sent him, the one he represents, then such a one is genuine because there is no motive of personal gain. Jesus is not concerned about his personal reputation as a teacher, he seeks only to glorify God.

19-20. Jesus now turns to the matter which is so important to the Jewish authorities - the fact that he healed the man at the pool on the Sabbath (5:1-10). The law was clear, "For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death." [Ex. 31:15] The Jews claimed that he had worked on the Sabbath and as that was against the law he should be put to death. They had other reasons for wanting to be rid of him because he was challenging their authority, but here they had justification for their plan. Jesus had already referred to Moses (5:45-47) but now he accuses them of not keeping the law themselves (he is about to illustrate this with regard to circumcision and also they were plotting to kill him [5:18]). Jesus now states publicly that he is aware of their plan. The crowd knew that their leaders were opposed to Jesus but did not realise they were actually plotting to kill him so they assume that Jesus has a persecution complex and at this they intervene in astonishment. Their claim that he is demon-possessed here means no more than our phrase, "You're crazy." They ask who is trying to kill him.

21-24. Jesus does not answer the crowd but continues to address the Jewish authorities. He goes to the root of their argument: by healing the invalid at the pool (5:8-9) he had 'worked' on the Sabbath. He now presents an argument on their own ground, the law, although he is not in bondage to the law as they are. It must sometimes happen that one law will come into conflict with another. The law stated that a male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after its birth and to perform such an operation was work. Obviously, on the law of averages, for one in seven babies the eighth day would be a Sabbath,. The Rabbis interpreted the law to allow treatment on the Sabbath if a condition was life-threatening but no one could claim that that applied to circumcision. So which law took precedence? The Rabbis had decided that circumcision overruled the Sabbath. In his argument Jesus has in mind two aspects of circumcision; certainly the Rabbis would hold that it was for the child's benefit and it was an act of removing part of the body - the foreskin. Why then were the Rabbis attacking him for benefiting a man by making him whole? Their legalism led them into observing the letter of the law, dealing with the matter on the surface, without recognising the purpose behind it and upholding that.

25-27. Almost certainly, as already explained, this verse follows directly after v.14. Jesus has begun to teach in the temple precincts and this prompts some of the people to ask why the authorities do not act against him. Incidentally, their comment, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" does not really make sense if vv. 15-24 should indeed be placed where they appear in chapter 7, in the light of v.20 where they are amazed that Jesus believes that his life is in danger, but is understandable if these verses follow Chapter 5, because by the opening of Chapter 7 the opposition of the authorities towards him would be more generally recognised.

Apparently someone makes the suggestion that perhaps the authorities have come to believe that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. But this is immediately dismissed on the grounds that Jesus is known to be the son of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth, whereas when the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from, he will just appear. This belief was the teaching of the Rabbis and had become part of the established tradition.

28-30. Did Jesus overhear these comments, was he told of them by his disciples (but there is no mention of him being with the disciples at this time; he had gone up to the feast secretly [10] and he was teaching whoever was willing to gather to him in the temple) or was this something revealed to him by the Spirit? However it was that he knew, he suddenly cries out in a manner which is more dramatic than the quiet teaching he has been conducting. We cannot know the tone of voice he used and so we cannot judge whether there was irony in his statement or a straight forward comment. Was he saying "So you are so sure you know where I am from..." or "Yes, you do know my human origin and history but there is more..."? Jesus returns to his constant theme that he has come from the Father and does only what the Father shows him. Here, he claims not only that he knows the Father, the one who sent him, but that they do not. This, predictably, causes consternation and they try to seize him. Who are 'they'? At this stage it does not seem that the authorities have had time to receive the news that Jesus has arrived at the feast and is teaching in the temple and to take action. So, presumably it is some of those gathered round him, many of whom may possibly have heard about him but never heard him in person. If they were traditionalists they would have found this teaching very difficult to accept; Jesus was claiming far more than any Rabbi would dare to do. Having gone up to the feast in secret, Jesus was now drawing attention to himself; in the light of such a claim this was inevitable.

In spite of their attempt to seize him in fact no one lays a hand on him. John gives no explanation of how this should be except that his time had not yet come (see 2:4 and 7:6) implying some divine protection.

31-32. However, there were others who did believe in Jesus, saying, "When the Christ comes, can we expect him to do more miraculous signs than this man?" This is a rather curious phrase because it implies that they did believe he was the expected Messiah, but John does not go quite as far as stating this. However, these comments are reported to the Pharisees who apparently then consulted with the chief priests and together they sent their police (that is the temple guards; the Romans would not have allowed them to have a private army) to arrest Jesus.

33-34. John has broken into his account of what was happening in the temple precincts in order to show that the authorities had, in fact, taken action to prevent Jesus speaking. He now returns to what Jesus was saying. Jesus is well aware that he is coming to the end of his ministry. Those who claim that he was taken by surprise ignore such statements as he was making here. Jesus knew he had only six months or so before he would die and return to the Father. His words must have a greater significance than their immediate meaning, for why should anyone look for him if, by then, he had been publicly executed? Of course, they would not find him. Jesus is the key or the door to the unseen spiritual realm which is the true reality. He came to open the Kingdom of Heaven and to enable mankind to cross over from this temporary world into the eternal. Soon his physical presence would be removed and he would no longer be seen except by the eye of faith. Jesus was obviously speaking here to those seeking to seize him and who did not believe in him. But the time would come when they, together with so many others in this world, would look for meaning and purpose in life and they would not find it because they would not realise that they were, in fact, looking for him and what he was offering. Not only will they not find him but, without him, they will not be able to come to where he will be. However, that is not what Jesus says. He says that they will not be able to come where "I am". In his earthly ministry Jesus was already living in the Kingdom; he had never left it. His existence, his life, is in the Father always.

35-36. It is not entirely clear who is speaking in these verses. The Pharisees and chief priests have sent their police but apparently do not themselves go to hear Jesus (45) yet John usually uses the term 'the Jews' to refer to the authorities. Perhaps he is inserting here remarks they made when Jesus's words were reported to them. Also, again we do not know whether this was a question they were seriously asking each other or whether it was a supercilious comment. Was Jesus planning to leave Israel and preach to the Jews living abroad and

perhaps even to non-Jews? It must have given John (who may well have been living in Ephesus when he wrote this) some delight to record these words because, unknown to those who uttered them, they were prophetic. This is exactly what was to happen; the risen Christ was preached to the Greeks - and many of them believed!

37-39. The feast involved was the feast of Tabernacles which, as well as a historical reminder of the days their ancestors had spent in the wilderness living in temporary structures, was also a form of harvest thanksgiving. It is uncertain whether the last day of the feast means the seventh or the eighth day. Originally only seven days were involved on each of which water was drawn from the pool of Siloam and carried to the temple where it was poured around the great altar as a thanksgiving to God for the gift of water - so vital to give life and produce fruit for the harvest. However, an extra day had been added on which this ceremony was not performed. Slightly different significance may be read into the action of Jesus according to which day was involved. However, the truth he wished to convey is applicable irrespective of the day. The effect Jesus produced must have been astonishing. John explains that this was no longer a teaching session (when a Rabbi would sit) but a very public pronouncement; Jesus was standing and he shouted - deliberately drawing attention to himself. In the light of the daily ceremony with the water this would have been most dramatic. His claim is that he can satisfy the deepest needs and longings of mankind. As has been said so often, to make such a claim he must have been either mad or truthful. This is a development of his remarks to the woman at the well (4:13 ff.), for now he takes it further, stating that the believer will not only be satisfied him or herself but will be the means of satisfying others also. The life-giving water flowing into them will flow through them and out to others. John explains that this is Jesus's way of describing the Holy Spirit, but he is careful to state that the Spirit had not been poured out on believers at the time Jesus spoke. He will go into greater detail when he records the Lord's teaching on the last night of his earthly life. Here he mentions only that the coming of the Spirit depended upon Jesus entering into his glory.

40-44. The action of Jesus has the result which surely he must have intended and which, having made it, would inevitably lead to irreconcilable conflict with the authorities. It was time for the people (and that included the authorities) to be challenged to make a decision for or against him. In fact, of course, it was a decision about their own place in eternity. The response is what it has been all down the years since then; some believe and others oppose. Some of the crowd say he is the expected prophet (see 1:21), others that he is the Christ. This is rejected by yet others who say that his background does not fit the prophecies concerning the Messiah that he will come from the lineage of David and from David's family town, Bethlehem. Although both Matthew and Luke record the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and devote considerable space to his lineage, John does not. This is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that he deliberately mentions this objection by those who do not believe in Jesus. Elsewhere John often inserts parenthetical remarks, so why does he not do so here? e.g. "For it was believed that Jesus came from Nazareth and not generally known that he had been born in Bethlehem, the town of David." In fact John is not concerned about reporting details of Christ's human ancestry; his purpose is to present him as the one who came from God and was always living in God. His stress is on the eternal world which exists alongside this world and which is the reality, while this one is not. It is from there that Jesus came to invite and enable us to enter it through him. For John, to talk about the human origins of Jesus would be a diversion and confusion.

Although some wanted to seize Jesus, no-one did; his hour had still not come although following this public proclamation, it could not be far away.

45-49. It is a little difficult to follow the timing here. It appears that the police were sent to arrest Jesus while he was sitting teaching in the temple, yet the public proclamation which he made was on the last day of the feast. Did the police not go until then? However, we do not need to know the timing; the point that John makes is that the police were themselves so impressed by Jesus and his words, that they did not bring him in. This is a testimony to the power and winsomeness of Jesus. Some in the crowd wanted to arrest him (44) yet the men who had been sent for that very purpose were willing to defy their employers and return empty handed. Their excuse is that they had never heard anyone speak as he did.

Instead of considering for even one moment that they might be wrong, or even listening to Jesus themselves, the Pharisees round on their police with sarcasm - "So he has managed to deceive you as well!" They then reveal their arrogance and also their contempt for the people placed in their care. Only they, the leaders, understand the truth and none of them has been fooled. It is so easy for leaders to fall into the trap of despising the very people for whom they hold office and here they refer to them as a mob or rabble and even claim that they are accursed.

50-52. Although the Pharisees claim that none of their number believes in Jesus, Nicodemus who is one of them, makes a stand. Some commentators criticise him for not being more open and definite in his support for Jesus. However, it is difficult to know what he could do. Admittedly he could have declared his faith more definitely but, whilst this might have given him a clearer conscience, it would have done nothing to help Jesus. As it is, he reminds his fellows that they are in grave danger of breaking the law which they have just claimed they alone know in detail. They have no right to condemn someone who has had no opportunity to put his case.

As so often happens when someone is about to do something illegal or unjust, they do not consider the facts or the truth but simply attack the person who points out their failure. They accuse him of coming from Galilee, the area where Jesus exercised most of his ministry and where he was popular (implying that the truth, of course, was found in Jerusalem with them). They claim that no prophet comes from Galilee; but even this is untrue - Jonah did and probably Nahum (from his home town of Caperna(h)um). Some ancient manuscripts qualify this statement and refer to the Prophet (40).

53. This is properly linked to 8:1-11 and will be discussed there.

## Chapter 8

It is generally recognised that 7:53 - 8:11 do not form part of the original text. There are a number of reasons for this e.g. it is not in the earliest manuscripts and certain words in this section do not appear anywhere else in John's writings. However, for me the most powerful argument is that this story does not fit into John's purpose. He has carefully selected a very few incidents in the life of Jesus and he uses each to illustrate the eternal reality of his being; he is the Son of God and belief in him brings eternal life to the believer. This story, beautiful as it is, does not fulfil that purpose; not only does it hold up the narrative (it feels out of place) but it detracts from the thrust of the gospel. This is not to say that the event did not happen; it is as truthful as any other incident recorded by the four evangelists. Several experts believe it was originally part of Luke's gospel, following on from Ch. 21 v.38. The reason why it appears here is very probably because some scribe, copying the text, believed it wonderfully illustrated the claim of Jesus that he passed judgement on no one (15) and possibly his claim to be the light of the world (12); so he entered the story in the margin from where it became inserted in the text (as what is called a gloss) by later copyists. I have come to believe that it is so out of place here that I would almost prefer not to comment on it at all because it is a digression. However, it is such a wonderful story and I am so convinced that it is true, wherever it happens to appear in Scripture, that I cannot pass it by.

7:53 - 18:2. These verses simply set the scene. It was very early indeed that Jesus appeared in the temple precincts, he gathered a large crowd around him and began to teach.

3-9. Presumably the woman had been caught committing adultery during the previous night. Maybe the offended husband had brought her to the Pharisees and they realised that they could use her to trap Jesus. Obviously they had no real concern for her or her husband; she was simply a means to an end. However, in our abhorrence of their insensitivity, we must not lose sight of the fact that she had betrayed her husband and we need to remember the hurt and shame she had caused to him, even though we know nothing of the circumstances of her unfaithfulness. No doubt she was ashamed and frightened at having been found out, but now the Pharisees bring her into the midst of a crowd and describe her sin in public. Allowing for the fact that the story properly belongs elsewhere - probably in Luke - it is still ironic that the Pharisees are oblivious to the fact that they have been plotting to kill Jesus while they are accusing this woman of a lesser sin.

They set a trap for Jesus which seems so watertight that they overlook a basic flaw in their plan which will emerge later. The Pharisees interpret Scripture somewhat loosely in specifying stoning, strictly that is for a woman betrothed but not yet married (Deut. 22:23); the case of a married woman is covered in Lev. 20:10 where the method of execution is not laid down (traditionally it was by strangulation); and, incidentally, the man committing the adultery is also to be put to death - where is the man in this case? The reasoning of the trap-setters is that if Jesus were to say, "She should not be stoned," they can accuse him of speaking against the law laid down in Scripture. On the other hand, were he to say that she should be put to death, not only would he lose the support of many who were attracted by his merciful approach to sinners, but the Jewish authorities would be able to report him to the Roman governor who alone had the power to pass the death sentence.

It is pointless trying to surmise just what Jesus was writing in the dust. It may have been no more than a doodle while he was thinking how to respond - after all the whole situation was being played out in public and no doubt the crowd were watching to see how he would respond. Jesus must have experienced a whole variety of emotions. There would be abhorrence at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in their willingness to divulge the shame of the woman. That she was a sinner is true, but the whole thing was intensely embarrassing and should have been dealt with in private. No doubt he would have liked to have spoken in righteous anger at the Pharisees, as he had done before, however, it would then appear that he was using this anger to avoid having to answer a point of law. Although it was a trap it was, in fact, a pertinent question which needed an answer and, of course, this is the point the Pharisees had not fully considered; whatever reply Jesus gave it was they and not him who had to act on the decision, they could not hide behind him; he was not a member of the Sanhedrin. They were faced with the very dilemma they set before him. When Jesus did not answer, no doubt they thought their plan had succeeded and so they pressed him all the harder. Whoever wrote this story

records that Jesus stood up, which would add authority to his statement, and said, "Anyone amongst you who is sinless is the one to throw the first stone." Then he sat down and continued to write in the dust. This is a brilliant example of a word of wisdom - a gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not debate whether or not the Old Covenant law still stands, he went straight to the heart, and therefore the motive, of the Pharisees. Their duplicity is exposed in the sight of the crowd; they lose face. Which one of them would dare claim to be completely sinless? Far from disgracing Jesus they have disgraced themselves. What are they to do now? There must have been a time of uncomfortable silence - uncomfortable for them. Their only option is retreat. Normally the most senior of them would bring up the rear of a procession; but in this case the younger ones would be reluctant to make the decision without prior consultation, which would be impossible in public. So the elders have to make the first move and, because they cannot discuss it, each acts independently, first one and then another leaves. They have been completely routed.

The record states that Jesus was left alone with the woman: that is, all who had brought her to him had left. Presumably the crowd Jesus had been teaching were still there.

10-11. The law cannot change a person's heart. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus was not primarily concerned about maintaining the law but implementing the purpose for which the law was given - to prevent wrong behaviour and encourage right behaviour. This woman had already suffered punishment by her public humiliation; Jesus wanted to restore her, to enable her to believe in herself and live the rest of her life as a person of integrity. She is released from condemnation, but Jesus does not condone her behaviour, he calls it 'sin', which is what it was. However, there is no mention here of the new life which Jesus came to reveal and to offer. This is a major reason why this passage does not belong in John's gospel.

12. We have already referred to the use of water at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37 ff.), but there was also the use of light. On the evening of the first day of the feast (but on this occasion Jesus was not there at its beginning [7:14]) four giant candelabra were lit in the court of the women, the area where Jesus now was. It must have been an amazing sight; the whole temple would have been lit up, similar in some ways to our custom of floodlighting castles and the like. It is the end of the feast but no one would lose the significance of what Christ was doing when he made the claim to be the light of the world. However, it goes deeper than this. In Scripture God is referred to as light ("The Lord is my light" Ps. 27:1) and the Rabbis taught that the name of the Messiah is light. Jesus has obviously thrown all caution to the winds, he knows his time is short (7:33 and 8:21).

Light has many facets; it provides a goal to aim at. To be lost on the moors at night can be a frightening experience - not knowing the direction to take. To see a light in the distance gives hope and encouragement; it is a sign of life, a place of shelter and fellowship. Light also illuminates the way ahead; we do not wander off the road or stumble over unseen rocks or into deep ditches. Light enables us to judge good from bad; we can see blemishes and match true colours. Unless we know what life is for, why we are here, we will have nothing to aim at and simply drift from sensation to sensation. Unless we know the ultimate source behind creation we will not recognise dangers, moral as well as physical, until it is too late. We will be unable to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil, reality from fantasy. Jesus claims to be that light which we need in order to understand this life and to walk through it. John has already laid the foundation for this claim early in his introduction; "In him was life and that life was the light of men" (1:4). This means more than that the life which Jesus led is an example as to how we all ought to lead our lives, although that is true. It refers to the source of creation which was in Jesus and which continues to be given to men and women in the person of the Holy Spirit. So the light we have is not simply something 'out there' for us to aim at or which illuminates the road ahead, it is actually within us so that we know the truth and this knowledge enables us to walk confidently through this world.

Jesus refers to us 'following' him. Yes, of course, there is the sense in which he has walked this earth before us and we are to follow in his steps, but it is deeper than that; he accompanies us as we walk - again, it is because he is within us. Jesus speaks of the 'light of life' because, his life in us is light (1:4).

13. The Pharisees challenge him on the grounds that he has no other witness to his claim. We meet the same problem today when someone appears on the scene claiming to be the long-lost heir of a famous or rich person; indeed, some even claim to be the Messiah! The Pharisees do not quote the Scriptural principle that there must be two independent witnesses: "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness" (Deut. 17:6). Perhaps this is because that, and other similar passages, lay this down in the context of the death penalty. However, Jesus will refer to this provision in his reply (17) and it is ironic that the authorities were, in fact, planning to put him to death.

14-18. There are many things which we know to be facts whether or not we can produce anyone else to witness to it. I know that the Grand Canyon exists because I have been there. On the other hand there are other 'facts' where we may be mistaken. Some people truly believe that they have seen spacecraft from other planets - even claiming to have been captured by aliens for a period; many who hear them believe they have been hallucinating. Jesus here claims the former type of knowledge - he knows where he has come from and where he is going. For the Pharisees, and for us, this causes a problem. How did Jesus know? If he was born truly as one of us, a human being (even if the manner of his conception was miraculous) with only a normal human brain, did he come with some residual memory of pre-existence with his Father? If so, and if this memory contained specific detail, can he claim to be fully human? If he had no such residual memory then was his 'knowledge' of where he had come from something he had gained from his fellowship with his Father during his earthly life? Elisha was obviously intensely aware of another, spiritual realm (2 Kings 6:15-17); he knew it was there and, in response to prayer, it was revealed to his servant also. It seems that Jesus similarly knows of this spiritual realm because he is constantly living in it.

The judgement of all human beings is suspect; we do not know or understand all the facts. At a simple level we can appreciate that there is a difference between a man who steals a loaf of bread because his children are starving and a pickpocket who steals a wallet. But when it comes to character and social behaviour we do not know what circumstances a person has faced to make them what they are. Jesus not only has the light which reveals the truth, he is the light, and this because he belongs to the eternal spiritual realm.

In one sense there is no need for him to judge, certainly not to condemn. In the light of eternity, that is to say in the sight of God, there is no question of weighing the evidence; the situation is crystal clear. It is not a matter of judgement at all, only of sentence and Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. Jesus (or more probably John himself) has already explained this (3:17-21). However, because Jesus is of eternity (he describes it here as standing with the Father) and because he is light, wherever he is then the true situation about anything and everything is revealed. In that sense he does judge or, at least, bring judgement.

17-18 As mentioned above (on v.13), Jesus now refers to the Scriptural injunction about having two witnesses before condemning anyone to death for a crime. He describes it as 'your' law, not because he does not recognise it but because his accusers live only by the law; their approach is a blinkered and unbending legalism. His crime, in the eyes of the authorities, is to make himself equal with God; and now he himself provides the two witnesses - his own claim to stand with the Father who sent him and the Father himself. With regard to the latter he is, no doubt referring primarily to the 'signs' he has accomplished or, as he constantly explains, the Father has accomplished through him. Yet for those with eyes to see the Father is revealed in other ways also; there is the effect he has on people. Of course, false prophets also have an effect on their followers but the proof lies in what that effect is. When bad people are made good and the despairing find hope, where he brings love and joy and peace then the evidence speaks for itself. It is difficult to differentiate between what is the witness of the Father and that of the Son, but that is hardly surprising in the light of the claim of Jesus that he and the Father are one.

As I have already said, Jesus has now thrown all caution to the winds. He is openly setting forth himself as the Saviour of mankind and leaving it to each individual to judge if that is so. In fact, of course, in making his or her judgement each of us is judged.

19. Having referred to his Father, Jesus is then asked, "Where is your father?" He had spoken to the Jewish authorities about his relationship with his Father some time before - following his healing of the man by the pool (5:16-18); so they must have been aware that by 'Father' he was speaking of God. However, they adopt a prosaic approach and ask, in effect, if his father is a witness then where is he?

The reply that Jesus gives is enigmatic but its meaning will be revealed later when he explains to Philip that the secret of his ministry does not lie in any personal power that he may have but simply that he is totally open to and at the disposal of his Father, "It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (14:10). Thus, as he states then, anyone who has seen him has seen the Father; here the same truth is expressed as, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." The fact is, the eyes of these who are entrusted with the spiritual leadership of God's people are blind to spiritual truth. They do not understand the quality of eternity, that realm from which Jesus has come, to which he will return and in which he is, in fact, living even while he is on earth - a realm in which he makes it possible for us to live now.

20. John draws attention to the fact that Jesus spoke all this in the court of the women, where the treasury coffers were. That is to say, it was beyond the area where Gentiles were permitted, so the Roman authorities would not be observing what was happening, yet it was the most public of the areas where the Jews would gather. Even so, in spite of the clearly Messianic claims which Jesus was making, he was not arrested. John comments that this was not due to any reluctant decision on the part of the Jewish leaders but because the clock of God had not struck the hour - Christ's time, although very near, had not yet come.

21. Jesus repeats his statement of 7:33/4 in a slightly different form (see my comments there). It is interesting to note the stress he puts on the fact that when he has been executed the authorities will look for him. Does he mean no more than that because his disciples will claim that he is risen and alive again, they will search for him? Certainly they will not find him in his physical body and they will not be able to enter into the spiritual experience of those who have the faith to know him.

Jesus makes the awesome statement that they will die in their sin. There is a problem for most of us as we try to understand what sin is, because we approach it from a legalistic standpoint. As we grow up we are taught that wrongdoing brings judgement; if we are caught doing wrong we will be punished. So our view of sin tends to be focused on particular acts of disobedience. It is difficult to think of any other way of teaching children the reality and consequence of sin. Indeed, this is how Scripture seems to approach the matter; from the outset God says, "If you disobey, (eat the forbidden fruit) you will die." Of course, there has to be the clear element of disobedient acts and punishment. However, I do not believe that God approaches the matter from that perspective.

Creation is an expression of God, of the person he is, and it is designed to work in a particular way in line with his nature. There is no alternative manner in which it can operate successfully. To step outside its 'laws' (not in the legalistic sense but in the natural sense, as with the law of gravity, and in the spiritual sense, as with the law of love) will inevitably bring failure. There is, therefore, an in-built judgement - we put ourselves outside the sphere of the eternal plan and purpose and do not belong to it. Whatever 'legal' judgement God may make and punishment he may impose, that is simply a corollary, a secondary consequence of what has already happened without him intervening in any specific way. If we refuse to board a plane taking us on holiday then we are left behind and miss the holiday. If we interpret that as judgement and punishment for not following instructions, so be it, but the company arranging our holiday would not see it that way.

The word usually used for sin in the New Testament, literally translated, means 'to miss the mark', as when an arrow misses its target; a person is not living as he or she was intended and designed to live. Once we have that understanding we can appreciate that to enable them to live in the right way is a better solution than to destroy them. Indeed, once they are living in the right way there is no need for punishment because the principle aim of punishment is to encourage people to stop doing wrong and to live in the right way. The element of retribution (a person who does wrong must be made to suffer) arises only when we adopt a legalistic view of sin; that may very well have a place in the administration by a government of a nation and

upholding its laws, but has no bearing on the eternal purposes of God whose intention is not to condemn but to save (3:17 ff.). This is why Jesus has such compassion for people; his approach is not, "you are a sinner and deserve to be punished," but, "you are missing the purpose and joy for which you were created, so change your ways (which is the true meaning of 'repent') and enter the kingdom." Hence his words to the Pharisees, "You will die in your sin."

However, having said that, this 'missing the mark', missing the plan and purpose of God, means that we follow our own desires and we become self centred instead of God centred. This leads us to behave in ways that hurt others and therefore hurt God, because we are pursuing aims which are totally opposed to God and the way he has designed creation to work. This principle of sin causes us to commit sins. Jesus is often described as showing righteous anger at the way people behave - as when the Pharisees are more concerned about whether a healing took place on the Sabbath than that it has been accomplished at all. It may seem, therefore, that Jesus shows the same attitude to those who commit sins as we do; so why have I spent so long in explanation if I come to the same conclusion? Because Jesus regards sin from a totally different perspective from our own legalistic approach. We are concerned with punishment of the offender; God, and therefore Jesus, is concerned that he or she should turn from their wickedness and live. Mankind has severely damaged this creation; this must not be allowed to happen to the perfection of eternity, no sin can be permitted to enter the eternal spiritual realm; so a way must be found to allow those who desire the way of the perfect eternal realm to enter it, yet exclude those who do not. To destroy all those who continue to 'miss the mark' may seem to be a punishment in their eyes and, indeed to all of us who think legalistically, but that is not its aim, anymore than it is the aim of a travel company to punish those who miss the plane taking them on holiday; it is a consequence. There is a saying "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," which holds a truth, but on a superficial level; it springs from a legalistic approach seeking to separate the sin from the sinner and then deal with the sinner on the basis of the sins he or she has committed. Once we understand sin as 'missing the mark' it is no longer necessary to make that separation because the sinner is under condemnation not because of what he has done, but because of what and where he is - a created being but outside the will and purpose of his Creator.

Seeking to perceive sin from God's perspective, rather than taking a purely legalistic approach, must not cause us to underestimate the dreadful sinfulness of sin. To be outside the will of God is a desperate situation, not only for the individual involved but for the whole of creation because what we do affects not only ourselves but creation, for good or ill. One of the most awesome phrases of Scripture is "The wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16). For us, wrath and anger are emotions which arise unasked, in the case of God it is implacable opposition to everything which is contrary to his perfect will. The words of Jesus, "You will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come," convey both infinite compassion and inevitable judgement.

22. On the previous occasion (7:35) the Jews asked whether he meant he was going to the Greeks, this time they ask whether Jesus intends to kill himself. Most commentators believe this was a mocking remark. The questioners on this occasion were Pharisees who, unlike the Sadducees, did believe in a future life. If Jesus committed suicide then, they believed, none of them, righteous as they were, would go where he would be.

23. Jesus explains the truth which had such a profound effect upon John and which lies behind the whole of his gospel - there is a spiritual realm which exists alongside this world. That realm is the eternal reality while this, real as it seems, is temporary; it is destined to perish - not simply due to sin, which has distorted it, but because God never intended it should be permanent. Jesus came from 'above', not in a literally material sense, but implying superiority. We human beings are all born, created, into this world, which is 'below' the eternal realm. There is nothing wrong in that, it was God's plan. However, his intention was that we should eat of the tree of life and move from this impermanent realm to the permanent. We ate of the forbidden tree and put ourselves outside the will of God. The effect of this is that we are no longer simply on or in the world, we have become of it and will also perish. Jesus came to reveal the true realm of eternity and to enable us to enter it. Unless and until we are born again of the Holy Spirit we can see only what is material and cannot comprehend the spiritual realm which is invisible to purely physical sight, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus (3:3). Although Jesus was fully human and was born into this world, he was not created into it; he already existed and was with the Father in the beginning, as John declared at the very opening of his introduction. The

Jews who were questioning him had not been born again of the Spirit and were still tied solely to this world and its materialistic understanding. In his essential being, although he became fully human, Jesus could never be anything other than from or of the eternal realm. So, they were from below and of the world, he was from above and not of the world (although at the time he was very much in it).

24. Whereas in v. 21 he had spoken of them dying in their sin (singular), that is the state of being outside the will and plan of God, he now speaks of sins (plural). By making ourselves the centre of our lives instead of giving God that position, our actions are prompted by wrong motives and we weave a web of sins. If we repent and put Jesus where he should be, Lord of our lives, and determine to serve him, then immediately we are set in the unseen spiritual realm and enter eternal life. This is why from an eternal viewpoint our sins can be forgiven because we are a new person living a new life. Of course, in justice, recompense must be made but it has to be made to God because, however much our actions have been directed against other people, the sin, in the final analysis, is against our Creator. It is ridiculous to imagine that we human beings ever can recompense God - what can we give to him that is not already his? That is why God has to bear the cost himself; but, once he has done that, every sinner who turns from his sin, even a murderer, can be forgiven and live. However, that is the eternal (and therefore most important) aspect. He may well still have to pay the price for his crime against society (as opposed to his sin which is against God), but that is temporal. While the Jews are still confined to this world, they are not only still in their sin (being outside the will of God) but their sins (the actions which that false position has caused them to commit). The reason why they are still confined to this world is that they will not recognise Jesus as the one who has come to save them. Jesus uses the term 'I AM', but to make grammatical sense we have to extend this to "I am he" or (as N.I.V.) "I am the one I claim to be".

25. This prompts the Jews to ask, "Just who are you?" The meaning of the reply that Jesus gives is uncertain; it is one of the great problems of Scripture. The two most frequent translations are along the lines, "I am what I have been saying all along," and "Why am I speaking to you at all?" Other suggestions are: "Essentially I am what I say," "My person is my message," and, reinterpreting the most common translation, "Everything I say to you now is only a beginning."

Although the interpretations seem to be very different, in fact the overall meaning is similar whichever one we adopt. What more can Jesus say than he has been saying all along? No amount of explanation can add to what he has said. In fact, it is not only his words, it is the person he is; he is self-justifying. We either recognise him for who he is and claims to be, or we do not.

26-27. There is so much that needs saying about the attitude and behaviour of his questioners because this reveals that they do not know the God they claim to serve. But they would no more accept what he would say about them than they accept what he says about himself. However, it is he, God, who is true and reliable, not they; Jesus is simply proclaiming to all who will listen, what he knows and which springs from his intimate relationship with his Father. But these Jews are so far removed from true spirituality that they do not grasp that in speaking of the one who sent him Jesus is referring to his Father.

28-29. The next words of Jesus must have been totally incomprehensible to his listeners, but reveal that Jesus was not only aware that he will be killed but the form his death will take. Indeed, when this phrase about being lifted up is repeated in 12:32, John makes that very comment.

Although the words are not totally incomprehensible to us, they do raise a problem because when he was lifted up, the people Jesus was addressing did not recognise that he was the one he claimed to be, and at the time of writing this gospel John must have known that. It is probably best to understand this statement as arising from the immediate situation facing Jesus. The cross and all that that implied was drawing near and must have loomed large in all his thoughts; what kept him pressing on towards it would have been what lay the other side of it, what it would accomplish. His death and then his resurrection and ascension would reveal the truth of the claims which he had made, and was now making ahead of it. So he was not addressing only his immediate questioners, perhaps not mainly them; he was referring to all mankind, "When you have lifted up

the Son of Man,” and stating a general truth - “Then it will be recognised who I am - the one I claim to be.” (Once again Jesus uses the term ‘I AM’ (see note on v.24). The culmination of Christ’s life and work was that ‘he overcame death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers’ (Te Deum).

Jesus develops teaching which will reach its climax at 14:9-10. He and the Father are so united that by looking at Jesus we are, in fact, seeing the Father. The Father is actually in Jesus working his work; however, Jesus has not abandoned his body to the Spirit of God (as a medium does in the practice of spiritism) but co-operates fully. All his teaching is what he has received from the Father. What was true of Jesus is true for us also - if we obey what we know of God he will not leave us but will abide in us (cf. 15:10).

30. John makes the observation that this explanation, with all its difficulties, nevertheless convinced many that he was speaking the truth and they put their faith in him. However, it seems that their belief is limited to intellectual assent. This is best illustrated by the oft-told story of Blondin about to walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls pushing a wheel barrow, asking a journalist who had come to report the event if he believed he would succeed. The man replied that he believed he would. Whereupon Blondin asked him if he believed enough to sit in the barrow.

31. Jesus is unwilling to leave these believers in a state of intellectual assent only; he seeks to lead them to surrender themselves to him. This is still the crux of faith today. If we believe that Jesus really does speak the word of the Father then, when that word is spoken to us, we must obey. It is a paradox; we need our independence of thought to assess his claim, and when that leads us to decide he speaks the truth, we have to surrender our independence to him. Of course, this is only the necessary reversal of the decision of the original Adam; he was free to obey or disobey the command of God. He could accept his role as a dependent being or he could choose to be independent; which was, in fact, a false choice because he was never designed to be independent. The choice facing these ‘believers’ is the one which faced Adam - will they accept and follow the teaching of God? If they truly believe Jesus speaks the word of God they will obey and learn of him and thus become his disciples, for that is the meaning of the word disciple - one who learns.

32. Because of who he is and where he comes from, Jesus holds the truth of the plan and purpose of all things. Because he is not of this world but from above (23), his perspective is not distorted as ours is. We are bound by so many things, particularly our past, our desires and our feelings. We have been taught how to live by people whose own views of life are distorted and we, in turn, teach others from our distorted perspective. We need to be set free if we are to see things as they really are - the ultimate truth which lies behind creation. That is what Jesus promises but we are afraid of facing truth, especially in the area of what we believe. The danger of fundamentalism is that it may be a defence against anything that may challenge the particular concept of God we hold. “My mind is made up, do not confuse me with facts.” If God is real, we do not need to be afraid of daring to consider new concepts about him, provided we truly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth (16:13). A boat may be built on land and fitted out in harbour, but it is designed for the high seas. So with our minds; we need to be taught the basic truths of our faith in doctrines but when we have met Jesus and have learned that he may be trusted utterly, we must follow where he leads. This is the joy and the excitement of belief - the discovery of the enormity of faith; the freedom which comes from knowing him who is the truth.

33-36. The problem of spiritual blindness is that it prevents us from seeing that we cannot see. The Jews refuse even to contemplate the fact that they are in any form of bondage. A major tenet of their faith was that they belonged to God who alone ruled over them. This, of course, was one of the problems the Roman occupying forces faced at that very time; their Jewish subjects exhibited a strong independence of spirit. However, Jesus was not speaking of freedom from outward allegiance, but the things which enslave us from within, and he goes straight to the sinful nature within each of us.

The great sin is the first sin mankind committed - the desire to be independent of our Creator (cf. note on 31) and it is still the sin of us all. It is true that whilst a slave may be a member of a household he is not a member of the family. To enter the eternal realm from which Jesus came and to which he belongs, we have to submit

to the Father as he does, as he has just explained (28-29) - this passage is all one in its teaching and development. These Jews give intellectual assent to the statements Jesus has made but will not submit to him or, therefore, to the Father.

If a slave is not a member of the family, a son is and can never be anything else. He may refuse to live with them and even seek to disown them but he cannot eradicate the fact that he is the son of his father. There is a double truth in the words Jesus speaks. He is the son of his Father and belongs to the eternal realm but, as John has already explained in his introduction (1:12), those who believe in him (trust themselves to him, not simply give mental assent to his teaching) also become children of God and enter that eternal realm; and it is that realm which yields freedom from the bondage in which all of us are held in this world (cf. note on v.32). So it is not only the truth which will set them free, but the Son himself. Indeed, he will explain later that he is the truth (14:6).

37-38. Jesus affirms that the Jews are physically descended from Abraham. They rely on that fact for their salvation - it is sufficient simply to be born a Jew. But the basis of Abraham's acceptance by God was that he believed his word and obeyed him. Yet here were they, Abraham's descendants, seeking to kill Jesus (7:19,25) even though they claimed to believe his words (30-31). In fact, of course, they were so bound by their tradition, by what they had been taught, believed and then handed down for generations, that the word of Christ found no room in them to take root.

Jesus explains that he is speaking to them those things which he has learned from his relationship with his Father. He uses the word 'seen', but in the sense of 'discern', so there is no need to assume he is speaking here of some pre-incarnational experience, but rather of his abiding in the Father's presence. He makes the contrast between what he has 'seen' and what they have 'heard', which carries the implication that he is not speaking of what he has been told by the Father, he has actually experienced it, discerned it for himself - he knows. There may also be a deliberate contrast between his 'speaking' and their 'doing'; in fact, there is an alternative reading to the effect that because he is speaking the truth of the Father they should do what they have heard from the Father (i.e. they say that they believe Jesus). However, more probably (in view of what follows) the contrast is between his Father and their father. At this stage he does not reveal who he means by their father.

39-40. This prompts the response following on from their previous comment (33) that Abraham is their father. Jesus replies that if this were really true then they would do what Abraham did. When men came to him with a message from God he believed them (Gen. 18). Far from receiving him, Jesus, they seek to kill him - a person who is telling them the truth of God. Jesus is utterly convinced he has heard God aright. The most that any of us who seek to teach the ways of God can dare to claim is that we so believe a fact of faith to be true that we have committed our lives to it. If we are wrong, then we are of all men the most to be pitied for we have staked our lives on something that is false (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19). It is right to do this because it is essential that every person lives out what he or she believes, otherwise we cannot be moral beings; and it is this which witnesses to others and which the Holy Spirit can use to convince others of the truth of the words we share. Nevertheless, although our 'knowledge' may be deep, it isn't in the same class as that of Jesus whose discernment of the Father springs from a relationship with him beyond anything even the most holy of us have experienced.

41. Because of the certainty of his relationship with his Father, Jesus again refers to 'their' father being someone other than God and that they are behaving as he does; but he still does not make clear whom he means. They pick up on this and, leaving Abraham aside, they now claim that God is indeed their father; they are not bastards. The enmity between the Jews and Samaritans arose because the former claimed that while their ancestors, the true Jews, were in exile in Babylonia, many of those left behind in Israel intermarried with other races and their descendants, the Samaritans, were thus not pure Jews. In this sense they were 'illegitimate'. These Jews, still relying solely on the matter of physical descent, claim to be true born.

It may be that there is a snide innuendo here. It is known that, a little later than this, doubts were raised about the legitimacy of Christ's birth. Almost certainly, in view of the problems he was causing them, the authorities would have made enquiries about just who Jesus was and where he had come from. Perhaps they had discovered that there was a mystery surrounding his birth and here they are implying that if there is a question about the legitimacy of anyone's birth then it is his and not theirs.

42. As we grow in our knowledge of God we see things from his perspective and begin to think as he thinks. Life changes from obeying a set of rules - even ideals - because in knowing the Creator we understand his creation. We recognise what conforms to his truth and what does not and this understanding brings freedom (32). If these Jews were in such a relationship with God, if he really were their Father, then they would recognise that Jesus was totally 'in line' with the Father, reflecting his will. Jesus is not setting up some new teaching or religion, promoting himself as its leader. He has come to reveal God; indeed, has been sent by him.

What more can he do than he has already done to make them understand? How else explain it? They are incapable of grasping anything beyond a totally literal interpretation of his words. But spiritual reality cannot be fully conveyed in words - even the words of Scripture. There is a sense in which words are like sacraments; they have an outward physical existence, a sound, but convey something other than and beyond themselves. Unless we seek that 'something' which lies behind the words we will be left with only the words themselves. These Jews did not comprehend this, they were not able even to see the kingdom of God (3:3).

44. At last Jesus discloses who he means by the term 'your father'; it is the devil. This, of course, is a frightening thought. It isn't simply that they are neutral, unable to see the truth that Jesus reveals in his person, his words and his deeds; they are actually opposed to God. They are being used by the devil to further his work. Is this the case with everyone who has not made the decision to put his or her trust in Jesus? Some would, no doubt, say 'yes'. I am reluctant to believe that. I believe that the devil is doing all he can to damage and destroy God's creation (Rev. 12: 9 & 12), that the whole world lies under his control (1 John 5:19) and that he is prowling around seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8); so every unbeliever is open to being used by the devil (as are believers if we are not alert). However, that is not going as far as to say that the devil is actually their father. Either Jesus is using the term in exaggeration for effect, or these Jews have become so hardened to the truth, deliberately rejecting it, that they have opened themselves to being used by the devil in a particular way. There is, of course, no implication that they were actually created or brought into being by the devil.

Jesus now explains why he says that - they exhibit the very traits that are his, the devil's. He was a murderer from the start of creation; that is, he is set to destroy all that he can of God's creation and, in the case of human beings, that therefore amounts to murder. That intention in his heart (if the devil has a 'heart') is set on doing all the harm he can to all that is dear to God. That involved tempting man to disobey, which brought death. That, in turn, led to Cain murdering his brother, Abel. Jesus is so aware of the reality of the battle between good and evil and knows that the devil is seeking to destroy him also. The Jews are even now plotting to kill him as they converse with him. In this they are willingly furthering the devil's cause. The devil is also a liar - right at the outset he told Eve that to eat of the forbidden fruit would not bring death. But the actual words of a lie are simply the outworking of the devil's character. He is opposed to the eternal reality which lies behind everything; that is, he is opposed to God. But reality is what is, it is truth; so there is no truth in the devil. Therefore everything that issues from him is a distortion of how God has planned things to be. It is the nature of the devil to lie and he may thus be said to be the father of lies.

45-47. Jesus is manifesting the truth but they are manifesting the nature of the devil in opposing it. No wonder he calls the devil their father. Jesus tries to focus their reasoning to circumvent their prejudice. If they do not accept him or his words what can they prove to discredit him? can they bring any sin to his charge? (No doubt they would cite the fact that he claims God is his Father which, in their eyes, is blasphemy.) It isn't only these Jews who are unwilling to face the truth. When it challenges us and our way of life; when it involves a major change not only in our behaviour but in our very understanding, and the abandonment of principles and

ideas which we have held, perhaps for a very long period, we can all be tempted to resist, dig in and take up positions which are irrational. The final stronghold to which we cling is the right to independence, "I have a right to my own life." Although there is a secondary truth in that statement in that God has given each of us free will, it is only absolutely true if we created ourselves or came into being in some automatic manner. If it is true that we are created beings then, per se, we 'belong' to our Creator. Whatever their profession, the Jews had built up their own system of faith which had taken them away from the truth of God. They no longer belonged to him, they had stopped their ears and could no longer recognise the truth.

48-51. Every Jew knows that he belongs to the chosen people of God. For Jesus to say that they who are true-born Jews do not belong to God is heresy. They therefore liken him to the heretical Samaritans. However, there is some doubt about what the Jews actually said here. Barclay points out that the Aramaic for Samaritan is based on the word for prince of the devils and so it may well be that what they said was, "You are a child of the devil and demon possessed." This would fit the context well. Jesus has accused them of having the devil as their father (44) and they retaliate by saying that it is he who is the child of the devil. Also, John has not previously recorded that they had been saying he was a Samaritan but they had said that he was demon possessed (7:20). Also, Jesus makes no response to their claim that he is a Samaritan but he does deny being demon possessed. It may be that there is, in fact, no reference to Samaritans but only to being demonised.

Jesus refutes this quietly and with dignity. There is no further proof he can give; finally his life and witness are self-justifying and if a person does not recognise that, there is nothing more he can do. There is no demon within him; Jesus is totally confident that his motive is to seek his Father's glory alone, there is not one iota of self-seeking honour within him. However, there is someone who seeks to honour the Son - the Father himself. This is a truth which applies to all, but supremely to the Son. Whoever seeks to honour God will be blessed by him. In the final analysis we cannot glorify ourselves, even though we have all tried to do this in the eyes of others. It is another angle on the statement of Jesus that he who seeks to save his life will lose it but he who surrenders or devotes his life to Jesus and the gospel, will find it (Mark 8:35). God knows the truth and judges the motive of Jesus and also judges mankind on our response to Jesus.

Those who respond rightly and seek to lead their lives according to the will of Jesus expressed in his word, will not notice the act of dying. The term, 'shall not see death' does not mean that the person will not die physically. The word 'see' in the Greek implies a deliberate perusal. A person totally absorbed in some task may not notice something else that is taking place nearby. There is the wonderful thought here that a person devoted to serving Jesus in this life will find that he or she has drawn so close to him that somewhere along the line they must have died physically but didn't notice it.

52-53. Once again the Jews misunderstand and believe that Jesus is saying that a true believer in God will never die. So they feel even more justified in claiming that Jesus is demon-possessed because Abraham, their father in the faith, who undoubtedly believed God, died; so also did the prophets who, because they were prophets, must have known God. Yet here is Jesus stating that anyone who keeps his word will never taste death (which is not what he said). Their reasoning is that if these people, who were so obviously true followers of God, have died, yet Jesus is declaring that he honours and represents God and that those who believe his claims as to who he is and keep his word will never die, then that is proof that he is talking rubbish. Who does he think he is? Is he claiming to be greater than Abraham?

54-55. It is easy enough for anyone to make claims about himself; we may all have inflated ideas of our own importance. So Jesus makes it clear that he is not seeking to glorify himself. However, he does have absolute confidence that he is right. This raises a profound matter. It is all too possible to be sincere in our belief about something, yet to be sincerely wrong. Of course, that is exactly the situation of these Jews. Nevertheless, the bottom line for all of us is that we must make a decision on what we believe about life, live out that decision and bear its consequence. Joshua realised that and shared that conviction with his people: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). So many people delay making that decision too long and die before they make it. It is right to consider carefully what we will believe; but then the choice must be made and we must go for it with all that we are, trusting that we are right.

If we are right, then we may trust God to justify us and it is for him to do that, not ourselves. In the case of Jesus, of course, it was more than justification of his claims, God glorified him; however, we need to remember the way of that glorification was the cross. Jesus has such absolute inner certainty that he does know God that he tells the Jews their behaviour reveals they do not. He is not making these claims for any ulterior purpose, he cannot deny what he knows.

56. The Jews had raised the argument of their being descendants of Abraham (33 & 39) and so Jesus tells them that Abraham had foreseen his coming. We use the phrase 'to look forward' in two slightly different senses; it may mean simply to look into the future, but more often it carries the implication of doing that with pleasure and joyful expectation e.g. "I look forward to meeting you". Here Jesus is saying that in the light of the revelations given to him by God about his descendants, Abraham was excited by the knowledge of the coming of the Messiah. So here, once again, Jesus is making a clear claim to be that Messiah.

57. It is difficult to believe, in the light of these words, that the Jews did not understand that Jesus could not be talking literally. Maybe they had gone so far down the line of opposing Jesus that they could not change tack at this stage and begin to question just what his meaning was. So they persevere in their literal approach and point out that as he is not yet 50 years old he couldn't possibly have seen Abraham. (In context it would make more sense to say that Abraham could not have seen him and a minority of scholars believe that is what they did say.)

58-59. Jesus now makes a profound statement and claim. "Before Abraham was, I am." Whilst the words 'I am' do not necessarily imply more than 'I exist', in context here they surely must mean more than that. The expected statement to follow the phrase 'before Abraham was...' would be 'I was'. To say, 'I am' would inevitably cause the Jews to believe that Jesus was deliberately applying to himself the name that God revealed to Moses when he asked how he should speak of him to his fellow Hebrews (Ex. 3:14). This is a claim to deity; the Jews recognise that and seek to stone him. It is surprising that Jesus was able to 'slip away', but, although his time was near, it had not yet come.

## Chapter 9

1-3. Once again, John selects a particular miracle - the healing of a blind man - because he can use it as a sign pointing to a far greater truth than the healing itself. He draws particular attention to the fact that this person was born blind; spiritually, therefore, he represents the whole of mankind. This 'sign' is a vivid illustration of Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus that unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The disciples have already learned much from Jesus and, as their teacher, they approach him using the term 'Rabbi' and ask him to resolve a theological problem. In spite of the teaching of the book of Job, the Jews still regarded all sickness and disability as the judgement of God on sin; so who had sinned here? If the man had been struck with blindness after some years of sight it could be argued that he had committed some sin: in this case, however, he had been born blind, so had he committed a sin in the womb (which some Rabbi's held was possible) or was this a matter of the sin of the parents being visited on the child? Jesus makes a wonderful reply, "You see this man as a theological problem, I see him as an opportunity for the glory of God to be revealed." There is no need to read into his words the assertion that God deliberately created him blind so that all these years later, now that he is a man, Jesus could heal him, even if a literal interpretation might seem to imply this. The attitude of the disciples is still prevalent today, "Why should this happen to me?" whereas the maturing response is, "What is God doing in this situation? how can I glorify him in it?"

4. This approach to life - "What is God doing in this situation? how can it be turned to his glory?" is something to be lived out by every believer and each of us has only one life to do that. Jesus refers to day and night; almost certainly he is referring to life and death. It is, of course, true that Jesus has defeated death and he has previously stated (5:24) that those who believe in him have already crossed over from death to life, but that is not what he has in mind here. Whilst we may enter eternal life now, nevertheless we still die physically; length of life in this world is limited. So we need to be working for God while we live here; the time will come when night (death) comes and no one can continue to do that work. Jesus deliberately uses the term 'we' to embrace those who are his disciples - all who see things as he sees them, because they belong to him and, having been born again of the Spirit, can see the kingdom of God. It is not the 'royal we' because he uses 'I' in the next verse.

5. For comments on Jesus' claim to be the light see the notes on 8:12. Jesus is still the light of the world for those who follow him but, of course, there is a special sense in which he was that light while he walked this earth as a man; he revealed both the Father and his kingdom.

6. Jesus used a variety of methods to heal people here he adopts a ritual of taking dust and spittle, forming mud and then applying it to the man's eyes. What is the significance of this when he could surely have spoken the words and that would have been enough? Perhaps it is because man was made from the dust of the earth and here is a visible representation of being born again. This time something of Jesus is added to the dust. It would be wrong to imply that the spittle was literally the Holy Spirit, but the outward form symbolically represents the power of the Holy Spirit who indwelt Jesus being applied to what was lacking in this man when he was born - the sight of his eyes. The mud is as a sacrament conveying the healing life of Jesus to this man.

7. Jesus sent the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. There is nothing magical about the water in this pool to effect the healing any more than there was anything magical about the water of the Jordan when Naaman was sent to wash seven times in that river to heal his leprosy. Both were healed by the Lord not the water. The meaning of the word Siloam - 'sent', simply refers to the fact that the water in the pool had been sent through Hezekiah's tunnel so that there was a source of water inside the city walls in time of siege. However, John draws particular attention to that meaning, so he must want us to appreciate some truth which is not immediately obvious. Jesus himself had been sent by his Father to be the light of the world and, in turn, Jesus sends his disciples to be that light. This man was sent and came away seeing. There is no indication that he returned to Jesus, in fact it is more likely from what happened later (35-38) that he did not, but went home. So although he had heard Jesus' voice, he had not seen his face.

8-12. People from round about who used to see this blind man every day were nonplussed; was this the same man? Obviously he would look like him but blind people carry themselves differently, especially the head, and they have particular mannerisms. Because he could now see, this man would move with a greater confidence and he would turn his head to see rather than to hear. There was also the major stumbling block - how could a man blind from birth suddenly receive his sight? So some say he is the same man and some say he isn't. He joins in the argument and insists he is, which prompts their question how were his eyes opened? His explanation is the simple and unvarnished truth and he clearly states that it was due to the man they call Jesus. But when they ask him where Jesus is he has to admit he does not know. On a pragmatic level this is understandable. He was blind at the time he was with Jesus who had then sent him away to the pool of Siloam. However, seeing he has specifically recorded this rather mundane fact that the man did not know where Jesus was, John probably wants us to take from it a deeper truth. This man had not sought out Jesus to ask for healing, it was a sovereign act of grace. There are many who receive some blessing from the Lord, accept it happily but never return to him in thanksgiving nor seek him out. The story continues for some time and the man states clearly that he believes that the person who healed him must come from God (33) but apparently throughout the whole event he makes no attempt to find Jesus - it is Jesus who seeks and finds him! He rejoices in the healing but, at this stage, neither has nor particularly desires a relationship with the healer. Perhaps it is because all his life he has had to depend on others; he has been the recipient of help and has been severely limited in being able to take any initiative, and so it does not occur to him actively to seek Jesus.

13-17. It seems that they bring the man for some formal examination by a group of Pharisees. It is at this stage that John drops the information that the healing took place on the Sabbath day. Although this is important and would influence the Pharisees as another example of Jesus profaning the law, John does not make over much of it; he has already dealt with the question of the Sabbath in connection with the healing of the cripple at the pool of Bethesda. However, he does record the fact that some of the Pharisees pounce on the fact that Jesus worked on the Sabbath as evidence that he cannot be from God. Others of them are more pragmatic and point out that the man has been healed and how can a healer be a sinner? Then they, who are the instructors and interpreters of the faith to others, do something which is probably almost unheard of; they ask the man himself who he believes Jesus to be. He states simply, "A prophet". In the Old Testament prophets were often authenticated by the miracles they worked. Although this man had made no attempt to seek out Jesus, he boldly states, when asked, what his belief is - his healer is from God; he is a prophet.

18-23. How dangerous a mind-set can be. It is important that we are taught values as we grow up; we need a rock to stand on as we survey the world. However, as we get our bearings and understand a little about how things are, we need to examine what we are standing on: is it as secure and reliable as we have assumed? These Pharisees are so sure that they alone have the truth that they are unwilling to examine what Jesus is claiming. Any alternative explanation is preferable to having to revise their own belief. So, perhaps the healing is false; the man was not actually blind. They call his parents and ask them. They are willing to confirm the essential facts: this is their son, he was born blind, he can now see; but they are unwilling to get involved any further because the Jews have issued an order that anyone who claimed that Jesus was the Christ was to be put out of the synagogue, and they are afraid. This punishment was far more severe than someone today being excluded from a church. The Jews were a nation as well as a religious faith. To be put out of the synagogue was virtually to be excluded from society. Of course, it was true that they did not know how the miracle had been performed but doubtless their son had told them that it was Jesus who had done it. They say simply, "ask him".

24-34. Their intransigence and unwillingness to change their mind set about Jesus, continues to cause the great problem for them to account for the healing so, again, they call the man to stand before them. They make it a more formal interrogation by their words "Give glory to God" which is an equivalent to "As you stand before God" - a charge to speak only the truth. John probably does not report all that they said but he begins with their statement "We know that this man is a sinner."

The man is resilient and delightfully pragmatic in the company of these weighty theologians. He refuses to make any judgement about that. He says simply, "what I do know is I was blind and now I see." Once again they ask him exactly what Jesus did to heal him. This, far from intimidating the man, increases his boldness

and his reply amounts to near insolence with his ironic question as to whether they are planning to become disciples of Jesus. This, in turn, provokes them to insults, which is always a sign that the reasoned argument has been lost. Indeed it leads them into making statements which rebound on themselves. They accuse the man of being a disciple of Jesus but claim that they are true disciples of Moses (through whom God gave the law which states that no work should be done on the Sabbath and Jesus had healed him on the Sabbath). They claim, "We know God spoke to Moses but we do not even know where this fellow (if only they knew what they were doing in calling the Son of God, 'this fellow') comes from".

The man boldly seizes the opportunity their words give him. "You do not know where he comes from, but he opened my eyes. I will tell you where he comes from. We all know that God doesn't listen to sinners but only to the godly who are doing his will. No human being has ever opened the eyes of someone who was born blind, so this man must be from God or he couldn't have done it." They have no answer to this and resort again to insult - "You were born blind which proves you were a sinner from birth. Don't you dare lecture us." And, although it was they who sent for him, they throw him out.

35-38. Crysostom said so well, "The Jews cast him out of the Temple; the Lord of the Temple found him." All down the years men and women who have been persecuted for their faith have testified that in their persecution Jesus has become even more real to them. The man has already stated his conviction that Jesus must be from God (33) but he had no relationship with him. Indeed, he probably had no relationship with God at all; he simply believed that God existed and should be honoured and feared. He did not realise that God can be known. So Jesus leads him forward by presenting a challenge, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Again, John has recorded this because it is a question we all must face.

The man's answer is more profound than he realises. He does not know who Jesus is speaking about so how can he believe in someone he does not know? However, he believes in the man who is speaking to him, the man who has healed him. It is a paradox because, of course, he is already believing in the Son of Man; he is willing to be guided by him. Jesus then reveals himself in a slightly clumsy sentence "Both seen him you have and he who is speaking to you now is he." Is there a deliberate play here in the double sense of 'seeing' which underlies the whole purpose of John in selecting this 'sign'? On the surface level, this blind man can now see and he is looking at the Son of Man. However, he has also 'seen' the truth, at least to some degree, that Jesus holds the key to more than just physical sight, he bring a new life in a new realm. These words of Jesus release a wave of understanding and gratitude, his faith grows and he cries out, "Lord I believe," and he worshipped him.

39. Jesus has previously stated both that he has authority to judge (5:27 and 30) and that he judges no one (8:16) [see notes]. Here he says that he has come into the world for judgement. His true purpose in coming into the world was to save not to condemn. However his coming had the inevitable consequence of judgement. This is a recurring theme in John's gospel: This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil [John 3:19]. This verse explains the same truth; Jesus has come to reveal the truth of eternity. No one has been able to see it before (a person has to be born again of the Spirit before he can 'see' the kingdom of God [3:3]) but now some do see it through Jesus. On the other hand there are those who do have learning and knowledge and who do see something of the truth but when the full revelation comes, they are unwilling to accept it because it doesn't fit with what they expect; their partial understanding becomes more and more distorted and they go further and further into the darkness..

40-41. Some of the Pharisees pick up on his comment that those who see will become blind and assume that he is referring to them and ask him if this is so - no doubt expecting him to say 'yes'. In fact his reply is even more damning. If they really were totally ignorant of God and his ways they could not be held responsible. As it is, they have been given an important partial understanding of God and his kingdom, but claim that they have it all. In making that claim they must accept full responsibility for failing to recognise the full revelation when it comes in the person of Jesus.

## Chapter 10

At first sight this allegory of shepherd and sheep, sheepfold and gate is confusing. At one moment Jesus claims to be the shepherd who comes in through the gate, at the next he states he is the gate itself. Perhaps that is due to the training we have today in the West for structured argument. The culture in which Jesus lived his life was different. When we understand the truth which Jesus was seeking to convey then his reasoning falls into place and we are less concerned to relate every detail of the allegory to a particular truth, but rather grasp the teaching as a whole.

God made us for himself; therefore the key to winning the allegiance of every individual and, thus, the people of Israel as a whole and then all the world, is God himself and, in particular the person of Jesus whom he sent for that purpose. The only way in which any human being can win that allegiance of others is if they come in his name as true servants of God. However the 'leaders' (as opposed to the genuine prophets) of Israel, had usurped God's authority and sought to rule the people in their own right, to demand allegiance which belonged to God alone. In this, therefore they were thieves and robbers. In particular they were seeking to prevent his people from turning to Jesus whom they saw as usurping the authority which was rightly theirs. In this they turned the truth on its head, for they were usurping his. John the Baptist was a true gatekeeper; he prepared the sheep for the shepherd and directed them to him when he came.

1-6. The human soul is made for the truth of God. When the truth is revealed the true soul recognises it and responds to it and 'opens up'. Those who are not the truth, yet demand allegiance can do so only by threat and force. Using the allegory of sheep, it is only the shepherd to whom the sheep belong who has the key to the gate or, as here, for whom the watchman will open the gate. (There is no need to attribute any person as the watchman, but perhaps the Holy Spirit fulfils a similar role.) The sheep recognise that this is their shepherd; each, individually is known to him and will follow when he leads them out. Once he has their allegiance he can then lead them through the world and they will follow because they recognise within the depth of their being that they belong to him. As we, the sheep, grow spiritually, we recognise the calls of the true and the false leader, and we will not follow the false because we know that we were not made for them; the Holy Spirit leads or guides us into the truth (16:13). The Pharisees with whom Jesus was speaking are the false shepherds but they simply do not understand the meaning of the allegory.

7-8. Jesus develops the allegory, claiming to be the gate. That is, he alone has rightful access to the souls of men and women. From the time of Moses and Joshua, generally speaking the leaders of Israel had failed to fulfil their role. God's complaint against them reached its height in Ezekiel 34, in particular v.10, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves." However, there is no need to press the words of Jesus to mean that every single one of the leaders of Israel down the years has been a false shepherd; in any case he is obviously referring to those standing before him as he speaks.

9. As well as being the gate to the Sheep, Jesus is the gate for them. Just as a sheepfold protects the sheep, so Jesus will keep his own safe. Historians tell us that some sheepfolds had no gate, only an opening. A shepherd would lie down to sleep across this opening so that no sheep could go out and certainly no marauding attacker could get to the sheep without waking him. Whilst that is an attractive illustration and carries a truth, that is not the main meaning here. In its context Jesus is thinking about true and false shepherds and about the sheep having fullness of life. To come in and out is a phrase implying life in general, going about our daily business. Here, however, there is the added implication of the believer living his life in two spheres; we belong to or are 'of' the eternal kingdom, but we are at present living out our lives in the world. From the two we gain what we need; both material and spiritual sustenance.

10. Jesus has come to bring people into the eternal realm for which they were created, compared to which life in this temporal realm is simply existence. Hence he describes it as life to the full or in abundance. Anyone who exerts leadership over others which prevents or hinders this, deprives them and deprives God; hence they are stealing, killing and destroying.

11-13. The word used for 'good' involves much more than morality, which can be coldly correct; it implies excellence, beauty, truth and attractiveness. In Biblical times a shepherd would have to deal not only with wild beasts but also with brigands and robbers. On occasions shepherds were, indeed, killed. But under that allegory there is a deeper truth. A lion or a brigand may take a man's life to gain what he wants to steal but Jesus is to explain (18) that no one is taking his life; he yields it of his own free will. The true shepherd not only owns the sheep he loves them. The hired hand is working for wages (nothing wrong in that) but when it is only for wages he does not care for the sheep. The Pharisees, whom Jesus is addressing, had shown no concern for the blind man, nor indeed for others whom Jesus had healed. They were concerned only about whether he had broken the law. Like hired hands they abandoned the sheep they should attend. In the allegory Jesus does not concentrate upon the wolf, who he might be; that is there simply to explain or prompt the behaviour of the shepherds. If we have to provide an identity, then ultimately it must be Satan.

14-15. Although Jesus continues to use the allegory of the shepherd and his sheep, he now speaks more and more of the truth it conveys. He, Jesus, knows those who belong to him - not simply aware of who belong to his flock but he knows each personally and intimately. What is more, his own also know him. Whenever he speaks like this - of knowing us, of indwelling us, of being united with us, he sets it in the context of his relationship with his Father. Constantly he has in mind the purpose of his coming; to draw us human beings into that intimate relationship which is life (10). Eternal life is not something that can be conveyed in itself, it exists only in relationship (see notes on 1:1); in its deepest sense it is family life and Jesus came to bring us into the society of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect harmony and knowledge. To do that he had to lay down his life.

16. This understanding (that the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in their constant interchange of love for each other desired to have others to love and created mankind) leads Jesus to remind or inform the Jews that God is God of all peoples, not just the Jews. Even though they believed that only they were his chosen people, they did not hold that there was another source of creation. Other peoples may be lost but they had been created by the one and only God. Jesus confined his earthly ministry to the lost sheep of Israel but "God so loved the world..." So Jesus states that he has other sheep who are not of this pen. It is important to appreciate that Jesus said 'pen' not 'flock'. There is only one flock because there is only one shepherd, but they may come from different pens. God loves all people, Jew and Gentile alike, and all who follow him are united into one flock.

17-18. We should not read too much into the word(s), "therefore", or "for this reason", as though the Father would not or did not love the Son for himself, but only because he was willing to lay down his life. A wife, who is already deeply loved by her husband may do some particularly sacrificial act for him, going out of her way to please him and he may say to her, "Oh, I love you for that". It is something which, if it is possible, draws out even more love from him. So here, the self-giving love which each member of the Trinity has for the other two is eternal, but the willingness of the Son to offer himself as sacrifice in order to save mankind and all creation, lifts the Father's heart yet more (at least, to put it in the terms of human understanding). Jesus stresses that his death is not something which 'happens' to him; he is in control, not his persecutors. He has authority, because this is part of the plan agreed within the Trinity before time began, to lay down his life and to take it up again. It is the will of the Father that he should walk this path and Jesus submits in perfect obedience. Here we meet one of the paradoxes of our faith which arise from time to time within the limitations of our human understanding; did Jesus rise from the dead or was he raised by the Father and the Spirit? The answer must be both. There was the willing submission of the Son giving up his spirit to the Father; "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46), trusting that the Father would raise him - the experience which we and all human beings who trust him must experience at death. Yet, unlike us, his intrinsic being is eternal and he must rise from death as cork floats on water. It is a mystery we must hold in balance until that day when we understand even as we are understood.

The willingness to lay down his life is not an isolated act; it is the culmination of the whole of his life, character and motivation. Jesus is a giver. Like his Father he is self-sacrificial love. William Temple comments. "His

death is not a defeat cancelled by the Resurrection triumph. It is itself triumphant, and the passage to a fuller vitality than was compatible with the limitations of the earthly ministry..."

19-21. As always happens when the claim of Christ is presented, either by himself or through others, those who hear the claim are divided in their response. On this occasion some see him as a deranged fanatic who will deliberately sacrifice his life for his cause. They say that Jesus is demonised and no one should listen to him. Others are not persuaded by that; there is something in his words that rings true. What is more, what about the man who was so recently healed of his blindness? That cannot be the work of a demon.

These arguments can still be heard today. To make the claims that Jesus made, that he was one with the Father, that he had authority to forgive sins, and that it was the Father working in him who performed the miracles which thus became signs pointing to the truth, he must be either totally deluded or indeed the person he claimed to be.

22-24. John now jumps some two months or so to December. We do not know where Jesus was during this period; did he remain in Jerusalem or did he withdraw to Galilee or some other area? It was winter, when Israel receives much of its rain, and Jesus was walking under the protection of the covered way of Solomon's colonnade. The Jews ask a question which is literally, "How long will you take up our soul?" This may well be a play on the words of v.18 where Jesus said that no one took up his soul or life. What they mean is aptly translated here as, "How long will you keep us in suspense?" Will he not tell them plainly whether or not he is the expected Christ. Presumably they are seeking to trap him because from all that has gone before they do not intend to believe that he is.

25-27. What can Jesus reply? It is not so much that he wants to avoid their condemnation but that they are unable to receive the truth. If he says "I am" (as he has already revealed himself to be to the woman at the well) they will assume that he is the sort of Christ that the nation was expecting - a military or political saviour, and he was certainly not that. On the other hand he cannot deny that he is the Christ his Father intends. So, without specifically claiming that title, he explains that he has already shown them, by word and deed, that he is indeed the anointed one of God (which is what the title means).

Jesus explains that the reason they do not believe is because they are not his sheep. He had made a similar comment in 8:47. Once again we meet the problem of predestination and free will which we considered under 6:37. He then makes a fascinating statement that his sheep listen to his voice. This is to say more than that they follow his commands, for that may mean no more than that they seek to obey his words which have been recorded in Scripture, they follow him. This implies a personal relationship with the living Jesus. We do not follow a religion, a system of faith, we follow a person and it is his intention that we hear his voice; that is, have his personal guidance. But it isn't a one-way relationship; he knows his sheep. To be a Christian is to walk with Jesus in a personal relationship as real spiritually as that between him and his disciples.

28-29. Although Jesus says that he gives them eternal life and that is true in the sense that he enables us to have it, the way in which this is experienced is to be in relationship with him. Eternal life is not a commodity that can be put in a box like a birthday present; it does not have any existence in itself. God alone is eternal; he is life (not has life) and apart from him there is no life. To have eternal life, therefore, is to share the life of God, to be in relationship with him. The work of Christ was to destroy the barrier of sin which prevents us from being in relationship with him. It is that relationship which is eternal life.

With regard to the statements that no one can be snatched from his or his Father's hands and the doctrine of perseverance, see note on 6:39. Only if we have the freedom to reject God can our choosing him have any value; and so, whilst no one else can take a person from the Lord we, ourselves, may choose to leave him.

Verse 29 presents a textual problem. Is it that the Father is greater than all or that what he has given Jesus (i.e. the sheep) is greater (in that context 'more excellent or precious') than all? Both would make sense. No one can snatch from the Father's hand those who are his and whom he has given to the Son, because no one is greater than he. However, the Jews would surely not query that last statement, so why make it? On the other

hand, if Jesus is talking about the gift of the sheep from his Father to himself being the most precious gift of all, no wonder both he and the Father will guard that. Whichever meaning is correct, no one will be able to snatch the sheep from either the Father or the himself because the two are one. Jesus will develop this statement about their unity at the end of his high priestly prayer in Chapter 17; here it is uncertain how much he is seeking to claim. There is no doubt that Jesus is God, John has established that in the very first verse of this gospel. However, it may well be that here Jesus is asserting no more than that he is totally united with the Father in purpose and will, without denying the greater truth that he is of the same substance as God. This statement preserves not only their unity but their individuality; they are not one person although John has clearly stated that they are equally God. Perhaps that assertion requires further explanation. There is a primacy within the Trinity, so the Father is above the Son. An illustration may clarify the situation. Both the Queen and the Prince of Wales are members of the same family, both equally have 'blue blood'. The Queen is no more royalty than is the Prince, but she is above him in authority.

31-33. The Jews understand the implication of what Jesus is claiming and specifically declare it in v.33 - he is claiming to be God. So they pick up stones to stone him as a blasphemer. "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him" (Lev .24:16). Jesus attempts to encourage them to use their reason rather than emotion. He directs them to his miracles and the adjective he uses to describe them is important in its context. It is the same word as 'good' in the 'Good Shepherd' and implies excellence and beauty rather than might. How are these performed unless it is the Father working through him? they are signs which demonstrate that the Father must approve of him. He asks them for which of these miracles they intend to stone him - which do not reveal goodness and compassion or which represent any blasphemy against the God they claim to worship? But they will not use logical thought. Rather than reason out how Jesus was able to work these miracles, they by-pass this and concentrate on the statement alone.

34-38. The response of Jesus is fascinating. His argument is not to deny that he is God but to demonstrate that what he has claimed so far is not unique. It is a specifically Jewish argument and he goes onto their ground (he refers to law) to make it. In psalm 82 the psalmist rails against unjust judges. His reasoning is that they have been placed in their position by God to act on his behalf. He reports God speaking to them, "I said, 'You are "gods", you are all sons of the most high.' But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler." (Ps. 82:6-7) Acting like any good Rabbi, Jesus takes this Scripture (which every teacher would know cannot be broken) and points out that if God himself refers to these men to whom or through whom he spoke, as 'gods' then what about himself, whom God has set apart as his own (as the 'signs' demonstrate) and sent into the world? Why then accuse him of blasphemy for claiming to be God's Son?

Here Jesus is beating them at their own game of quoting the law. He has come onto their ground because they are unwilling to come onto his - to judge him according to the works he has manifested. He attempts again to make them face this: "If you cannot believe my words then believe the testimony of the works. If what I do is not what God is doing then, by all mean reject me. But you really must make a judgement on this matter of the works and the evidence they provide:- the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

39. Apparently, because of the cogency of this argument, the Jews give up their attempt to stone Jesus, but they once again try to arrest him. The fact that he escapes seems to be divine intervention.

40-42. There were a number of reasons why Jesus should go back to the place where his ministry began. First, although his ministry was drawing to its close, the time for the cross was not yet. It was sensible, therefore, to withdraw from the hostility of the Jewish leaders. Also, no doubt Jesus needed to spend time preparing himself for the ordeal which lay ahead. Where better to go than the place where he had been baptised and had entered upon his ministry? It is good sometimes to withdraw from the heat of the battle and reflect on the way that God has so faithfully led us. What is more, it was good not only for Jesus but for his followers; his disciples and those who were about to believe. In that place, of course, there were many who had been deeply affected by John's preaching. Although he had, himself, worked no miracle, they now recalled that everything

he had said about Jesus had come true, and they believed in Jesus. It may be that their faith was somewhat tenuous but, for all of us, faith is a journey. It is starting the journey that is important.

## Chapter 11

1-3. John now records the last of his seven 'signs' - the raising of a man from the dead. He names him as Lazarus, explaining first only that he came from Bethany, the same village as Mary and Martha. He assumes, therefore, that his readers will have heard of the sisters and the story recorded in Luke 10:38-42 which does not, however, mention Lazarus. John then reveals that Lazarus is their brother and, to identify the three of them more closely, he comments that the Mary he is speaking about (for this was a common name) is the one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. In fact, this had not yet happened - John will record this in chapter 12. It seems, therefore, that he is aware that this latter event was already well-known: both Matthew and Mark record the event but without mentioning the name of the woman.

Of course, Luke has already told a similar story about a woman who had washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair and then anointed them with expensive perfume. However, there are important differences in the two events. In Luke's account the woman was a notorious sinner (there is no hint that this applied to Mary), a stranger to Jesus; it took place in the house of a Pharisee and gave rise to Jesus criticising his lack of courtesy and a parable illustrating gratitude for forgiveness. In the story John will tell about Mary, she is a close friend of Jesus, the anointing took place at a private party and there is no mention of tears. It would appear that they are two separate events. If the objection is raised that this is such an unusual action that it is unlikely that it should be performed on two different occasions by different women, it may well be that Mary had heard of the previous occurrence and this influenced her when she was seeking to find some way of expressing her own love for Jesus.

Lazarus falls seriously ill and the sisters send word to Jesus. John puts it so simply; no specific request, only the fact that their brother is ill. What a lesson in trust. Scripture teaches us different lessons for different circumstances. Often we have to be specific. When blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus as he passed by, the Lord asked him what he wanted him to do for him and he had to spell it out "Lord that I might receive my sight" (Mk. 10:51). Here, however, the sisters know it is sufficient to bring the matter to the attention of Jesus and leave it in his hands. They loved their brother but knew that Jesus loved him too. However much we love a person, even as close as husband, wife or child, God loves them more. Sometimes we do not know what to pray and must simply bring a person to the Lord and leave them in his hands

4. It seems that as Jesus receives the news he receives also a word of knowledge that his Father has a particular plan and purpose in this sickness. He tells the disciples that the outcome will not be death but that God will use it for his glory so that his Son may be glorified. What he does not reveal immediately is that death will be involved. Usually when Jesus speaks of his being glorified he is referring to his death on the cross; is that the case here? Certainly according to John it was the miracle of the raising of Lazarus that made the Jewish rulers decide finally that Jesus must be put to death (v. 53). In the life of Jesus and the miracles he wrought there is a growing ascendancy in the three which involved raising the dead. First the daughter of Jairus who died as Jesus was on his way to her. Then the son of the widow of Nain who was being carried out for burial, and now Lazarus who had been in the tomb for four days. These were foretastes, so to speak, of the true resurrection which was to come only after Jesus had himself risen from the dead. The whole incident of the sickness, death, and raising of Lazarus was the catalyst which brought about Christ's own death and resurrection. So, yes, the glorification of Jesus was not in the raising of Lazarus, but in the lifting up of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus rarely used the term 'Son of God' of himself, he preferred to speak of 'the Son of Man.' Was he here thinking not so much of his role as the representative of mankind, but the fulfilment of the divine purpose agreed in the unity of the Father and Son in choosing the cross as the means of salvation?

5-6. John now records two facts and lets them speak for themselves without comment. Jesus loved Martha and Mary, yet on hearing the news that Lazarus is ill he deliberately waits two days before starting out. Presumably it is because he wants to ensure that Lazarus has died before he reaches Bethany. He wants to do something greater than healing his sickness; he wants to raise him from the dead! So often we desire less than God is willing and planning to give. From one viewpoint it seems unnecessarily cruel to put the sisters through

all the pain and sorrow of seeing their brother die. We need to change our thinking and understand that the first purpose of creation is the glory of God - we exist for him, not he for us. Once that thought is firmly established we can then see God showing infinite care and compassion to all his creatures, but that must be the foundation on which we stand. A major part of faith is trusting the Lord when we do not understand what he is doing. Often people put pressure on Jesus to do what they wanted in the way they wanted it. Jesus refused to bow to such pressure, not to assert that he was 'his own man', but because he was his Father's man. He heard what people wanted but he followed the instructions of his Father.

Because of the incident in Luke 10:38-42, where Martha is over busy while Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, we tend to think that Mary was more important to Jesus than her sister. However, it is interesting that while in v.1 John mentions Mary ahead of Martha, here he refers to "Martha and her sister."

7-8. After those two days Jesus announces that they are to return to Judea. He doesn't specify Bethany and, after the passing of two days, the sickness of Lazarus would not have been quite as vivid in the minds of his disciples as when the news arrived; nor, apparently, had Jesus told them of his plan. From their viewpoint, he had explained that the illness was not all that serious and Lazarus would recover. So their reaction is to remind Jesus that the last time he was in that area the Jews had tried to stone him, so why go back to that area with its danger?

9-10. John records the answer Jesus gave and, no doubt, had come to see its greater significance as time had passed. The immediate meaning seems to be that each day has its allotted length. In Jewish reckoning the length of an hour varied according to the length of daylight. The time from sunrise to sunset was divided into twelve equal portions. That fact, however, does not affect the argument Jesus is making. Jesus has his 'day' appointed by God, his Father. It will end at the time decided by the Father. His enemies cannot cause it to end before that and he will not attempt to extend it. During that time (his allotted twelve hours) he will be safe and avoid the dangers that lie in the way. On a number of occasions he had escaped, apparently miraculously, from the hands of his enemies (Luke 4:30, John 8:20, 10:39). On the other hand, were he to seek to extend his time, he would no longer be within the Father's will and would therefore not know what he should do and would stumble because he would not have the light of the guidance of God.

However, almost certainly John sets down this saying appreciating a deeper meaning. Jesus had already claimed to be the light of the world (8:12); if we live out our lives for him, seeking his will, we have an understanding of what life is for, and where we are heading. With that sense of purpose we can see what will cause us to stumble and miss the way. Without him, however, as John so often reminds us, we do not know what life is for and so we are in spiritual darkness. We do not know that there is a way, let alone how to find it. The theme of light and darkness figures prominently in John's record.

11-15. Jesus now explains that he is going to Lazarus because he has 'fallen asleep' and he will wake him. Beautiful as it is, why did Jesus use this euphemism for death? In fact, of course, it is only beautiful because it covers and hides the desperate sorrow, pain and horror of death. Scripture is realistic when it calls death an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). But Jesus was about to take away the sting of death. Henceforth, for all who trust in him, death has been transformed. It still brings the keen grief of parting but it is not the end; it is a gateway into the fullness of the kingdom. Jesus saw death in a different light from everyone else and so he uses a different term which conveys life rather than decease.

However, the disciples take the remark at face value; why go into such danger just to wake a sleeping man? After his illness it will do Lazarus good to sleep, it is part of his recovery. Jesus now explains the reality, Lazarus is dead. The statement that he is going to wake him now assumes a new and startling significance.

Jesus constantly surprises us with his perspective on events. His concern in the whole of this matter is that the disciples should believe. That does not mean that he has no compassion for Martha and Mary - that will be revealed clearly when he is with them; but the evangelisation of the world depends first on these, his disciples. They already had some faith but it needs to be deepened. Had Jesus been at Bethany when Lazarus fell sick he would have been called upon to heal him and in that circumstance he could hardly have refused. Had he just

died, Jesus would have been expected to raise him immediately - he had done this with the daughter of Jairus, whom he raised within minutes of her dying, and the son of the widow of Nain who had been dead a little longer and was actually being carried out for burial. In this case, Lazarus will have been in the tomb four days by the time Jesus arrives. He tells his disciples that he is glad about this because it will increase their faith.

16. The name Thomas (Aramaic) is the same as the Greek Didymus meaning 'twin'. He is ever the realist but he shows remarkable courage. He is convinced that a return to Judea will result in the death of Jesus but he will not leave him to face this alone. He will face the danger with his Lord. We know that, under pressure, like the rest of the disciples he will forsake his Lord and flee. But here we see the intention of his heart.

17-20. It is interesting to reflect on what Jesus did and did not know during his earthly ministry. It seems that, being fully human and having laid aside most of the attributes of deity (though not deity itself), he was dependent upon the Holy Spirit revealing facts to him through words of knowledge. (For a fuller clarification of this see 14:9-14.) Already he knew the Father's plan that Lazarus should die but that he, Jesus, should 'wake him' by raising him to life. It was not important for him to know more than that at this stage. On arrival at Bethany he discovers (presumably by someone telling him) that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. He has not yet entered the village itself (v.30). Is he on his way when Martha comes to him (20)? or does he deliberately wait on the outskirts because his mission is to go to the tomb where Lazarus has been laid rather than to the house where many people would be coming and going? It was the Jewish tradition that friends should call personally on the bereaved relatives.

John refers to this by mentioning that Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem so that it was easy for the friends and acquaintances of Martha and Mary to come and pay their respects. He uses the term 'Many Jews'. This would cover a whole variety of people, some, like the sisters, being supporters of Jesus, others not.

The personalities of the two sisters are revealed through the narrative. In Luke 10:38-42 we see Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus while Martha is busy preparing the meal. Here, again, it is active Martha who, having been told by someone that Jesus was nearby, goes out to meet him while Mary stays in the home. It may well be that someone needed to be there to receive the callers; but it is Mary who is content to let Jesus deal with the situation as he decides.

21-22. During the crisis of the past few days how often must the sisters have said to each other, "If only Jesus had been here, he would have healed Lazarus." So that is the first thing she says when she meets him. It is difficult to know whether these words carry a mild rebuke. After all, they had sent to Jesus and, presumably, the messenger would have returned and told them that Jesus had said, yet it had! The sisters would have known also that Jesus had not come immediately. Mary must have found it all very confusing. However, there was no place for argument. The very nature of a miracle is that it is something which is not normal. Logically we can hardly complain that someone does not work a miracle. But at the time of grief, anger or any strong emotion, we are not logical. We can still rail at God when he does not give us what we want. Perhaps, there is no rebuke because it may be that Lazarus had died before Jesus could have reached them anyway, and this is just a comment reflecting the fact that Jesus was not with them when Lazarus had fallen ill.

However, Martha adds, "I know even now God will give you whatever you ask." What did she mean? Was this some seed of faith that even now, after four days, Lazarus could be raised? If so it was only a mustard seed. So often Mary is depicted as the sister with the deeper faith while Martha was the practical one. Yet here is Martha revealing a deep faith in Jesus and his power with God. (However, see note on 16:23)

23-24. As so often in dealing with individuals Jesus leads Martha on in the development of her faith. "Your brother will rise again." It is the sort of thing we may say today when we seek to find some word of comfort for those who have lost a loved one; but, of course, when spoken by Jesus the words carry a greater authority. Nevertheless, such words do not ease the present pain and grief - the resurrection seems a long way off.

Martha expresses that in her reply; she knows he will rise again at the last day. By no means everyone believed that - the Sadducees did not.

25-26. Typically, John reveals the heart of this 'sign' which, alone of the four evangelists, he records. Great as the miracle is to raise a man to life who has been in a tomb for four days, that alone is of no benefit to us. We may exclaim in wonder that once, long ago, Jesus was able to do this, but that is all. What makes it meaningful for every human being is his statement, "I am the resurrection and the life." It has been rightly said that Jesus is not the resurrection because he rose from the dead, but he rose from the dead because he is the resurrection. As so often with Spiritual truth it has to be revealed from a variety of angles. One aspect of the truth is that God raised Jesus from death (Col. 2:12), another that he himself had power to lay down his life and to take it up again (10:18). It is the property of cork to float in water. It is the property of Jesus to be the resurrection and the life (Acts 2:24). That property is such that it can be imparted to all who will unite themselves to him. Shortly Jesus is to teach that he will dwell in his own and they will dwell in him (14:20, 15:4) and thus his property of being the resurrection and the life will be in them and they in it. Here he tells Martha that all who believe in him will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in him will never die. Again John brings out the truth which underlies the whole gospel: alongside this physical, material life, which is temporal, there is an eternal spiritual reality. That reality enters us when we surrender ourselves to the truth revealed and offered to us in Jesus. So when we meet death, instead of it holding us, we soar above it and leave it behind.

27. We have seen that Martha had the faintest glimmer of hope that the Lord might do something to bring Lazarus back; Jesus, however, spends what to her must be precious time, explaining a deep truth. But this is what this 'sign' is all about; this is why he delayed in coming to them - to build up the faith of his disciples, of whom Martha is one even if she was not one of the twelve (v.15). So Jesus asks her, do you believe this? She makes a wonderful reply. She cannot possibly understand the full significance of what he has just sought to explain. We cannot plumb its depths however long we meditate upon it, so certainly on hearing it for the first time she would not grasp it. But she knows him, and on the strength of that knowledge she is willing to accept what he says, even if it is beyond her understanding. So often we who believe today have to follow her example. There is so much we do not understand, but we know him whom we have believed and rest secure.

28-31. Without taking any action regarding Lazarus, Jesus sends Martha back to ask Mary to come to him. It is pointless discussing in any detail the motive of Jesus in waiting where he was. He had met privately with one grieving sister and now he would meet with the other. Once again John uses a device he employs frequently in his gospel; he records words spoken on a particular occasion and to a particular person, but which relate to every one of us - "The Teacher is here and is asking for you." Although the authorised version is less accurate, in today's language, the title 'The Master' is more powerful. Martha had drawn her sister aside to convey the message, no doubt to avoid having everyone else rushing to Jesus once they knew he was nearby. However, instead of slipping away quietly, Mary moves suddenly and quickly, drawing attention to herself. The friends and acquaintances notice this and follow her assuming she wishes to mourn at the tomb.

32. Mary, probably more emotionally demonstrative than Martha, throws herself at the feet of Jesus and says exactly what her sister had said and what they had been saying to each other, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." However, she did not add what Martha had said - that God would even now give to Jesus whatever he asked.

33-36. Jesus saw the tears of both Mary and the Jews who had accompanied her. Although he knew that he was about to raise Lazarus, the depth of their suffering touched him and he burst into tears himself (35 - the shortest verse in the Bible).

Commentators worry over the word translated 'deeply moved' as a dog worries a bone. It carries a sense of frustration and is used of a horse snorting. Some see in it an anger leading to stern admonition because it does carry this implication elsewhere. From this they read that Jesus was angry against the invasion of sin which causes suffering and death. Doubtless he was, however, it may well be that the cause of this deep emotion was

something more personal to the Lord alone. There is no doubt that he was affected by the sight and sound of so much grief, but there is the knowledge that he could have healed Lazarus and prevented his death. The reason he had not acted earlier was to bring greater glory to God (4) and to build up the disciples' faith (14); so that instead of healing a sickness which would lead to death, he would perform the far greater 'sign' of overcoming death itself. Nevertheless, he carried the burden of having to allow this family and their friends to pass through deep suffering which he could have prevented. Here we see into the very heart of God. There is so much we do not understand about suffering, particularly of those whom we call 'the innocent', and we are left asking "why?" Either we give up in despair or we hang on in the faith that "God is working his purpose out" even when we can see no rhyme or reason for what is happening. This passage of Scripture reveals that God is not impassive, our suffering affects him deeply even while he has to permit it in order to work the greater good. The effect of sin can be, indeed has been, overcome, but not at the wave of a magic wand.

Jesus has no opportunity for an intimate conversation with Mary; indeed, John records no words at all spoken to her. It is no time for explanation now, rather to fulfil the purpose of the whole event and turn their sorrow to joy. He addresses all who have gathered around him, and asks where they have laid Lazarus.

He is in tears as they take him to the grave and some of the Jews remark on how much Jesus must have loved his friend, but others make a similar comment to that expressed by each of the sisters - if Jesus had healed the blind, could he not have prevented Lazarus from dying? Because John is very selective in what he records, the fact that he reports three times this expression of confusion and disappointment that Jesus had not acted to prevent Lazarus dying, he obviously wants to draw our attention to it. Surely his purpose must be to encourage us to understand the truth that God may allow what to us is a tragedy (and what, as we have seen, distresses him also) in order to bring about some greater good in the long run.

38-40. For those of us who have grown up in the Christian Faith it is natural for us to think of Jesus as a miracle worker - that is what he did. But we need to consider the cost involved. If it is true that, although he never ceased to be God, he was subject to the limitations of a human body with a human mind and emotions, then his miracles were dependent upon his faith for their accomplishment. Here Jesus faces the greatest miracle of all - the raising of a body four days after death. Surrounded by at least a small crowd, he faces the sealed tomb. He believes he has heard the Father correctly that he was not to heal Lazarus but allow him to die so that he might work the greater work of raising him from the dead. Now his belief is put to the test and Jesus moves forward in faith, "take away the stone".

Martha, ever practical, tries to intervene; objecting that the decaying body (in that hot climate) will give off an unpleasant smell. Where is the grain of faith she exhibited when she was speaking privately to Jesus? (22) How often do we think we know better than the Lord and tell him how he should act? Martha's is a very natural reaction but it is prompted solely from a worldly viewpoint.

Jesus seeks to establish her faith. As John has recorded his earlier conversation with her (21-27) he did not then speak of God's glory. However, the messenger no doubt reported to the sisters the comment Jesus had made when he delivered the news that Lazarus was ill (4).

41-42. We must remember that John refers to the miracles he has selected as 'signs', that is they point beyond themselves. Great, therefore as this miracle is, we must look beyond what actually happened to what it signifies. Throughout the whole of his gospel John teaches that unless a person is 'in' Jesus, who is life, he is in a state of death. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (5:24/5). Each of us has failed to be the person we could be, the person we were designed to be. We are ashamed of our failures and have tried to push them down into our unconscious as though it is a dustbin, and have then placed the lid on it in the hope that they will be forgotten. But they are there, mouldering and putrefying. The Lord's way of dealing with them is to lift off the lid, bring them to the light, throw them away and then cleanse us so that we may have life. He didn't put the lid in position any more than he put the stone over the tomb. Men had put the stone there so men

must take it away. Similarly we must be willing to remove our dustbin lids and give him access, even if what is in there stinks.

So the stone is removed, but before working the 'sign' Jesus pauses to act out another sign. He looks up and gives thanks to his Father for answering his prayer - presumably a prayer that at his word Lazarus will be raised to life. There is no record of him having made this prayer, other than this thanksgiving. There is a lesson here for us. Prayer is vital but often it has to be made in private, a matter between God and ourselves. In public it is the place for action in the name of the God. Of course, by giving thanks before the prayer has been answered, Jesus demonstrates his faith, but it is more than that; he is publicly directing the attention of the onlookers to the Father and not to himself. He actually declares as much - he has said it for their benefit. He wants them to understand that the power to work the miracle does not lie in himself but in the Father who is responding to his prayer. Also, because his prayer is answered, this confirms his claim that he is intimately related to his Father; it is his Father who has sent him.

43-44. The moment has come. Jesus does not pray - he has done that already - he commands. Once again we see the power of the word spoken with intent: God speaks and the 'thing' happens! It must have been an incredible scene. The words echo and then there is silence, with all eyes fixed on the open tomb. There would have been a delay as Lazarus staggered to his feet, encumbered by the grave clothes. Then slowly the figure appeared, shuffling from the shadow into the sunlight. No sign of flesh; hands, feet and face wrapped up in strips of cloth - an unnerving sight. There would have been a gasp from the crowd. What must Jesus have thought? He saw his faith rewarded; the greatest sign he had accomplished, Lazarus had been restored to life. As with the stone so with the grave clothes; human beings had put them there and human beings had to remove them.

So John has recorded the last of the seven signs he has selected and he is only half way through his story. There is one further sign to come which does not form part of Jesus's earthly ministry - his own rising from the dead. This will be the greatest miracle of all. Lazarus had been restored to life but one day would die again. Jesus was to rise in the resurrection life, and that is eternal.

45-48. This miracle of restoring Lazarus to life, fulfilled its purpose as a 'sign'. It prompted a response. Many of the Jews who had come to 'pay their respects' (cf. 19) to the sisters (only Mary is mentioned but there is no need to read any significance into that) took careful note of what Jesus had done and became believers. This does not necessarily mean that they fully committed their lives to him. Faith is a journey and this was their first step. They had probably had little contact with Jesus beforehand. No doubt they would have heard of him, maybe even heard him speak, but had had no motivation for personal response one way or the other. But there were some on whom the sign had the opposite effect. They would know of the opposition of their leaders to Jesus and now they could see why. So many of their fellows were believing in him. Obviously news of the astonishing miracle would spread like wildfire and more and more people would become followers of this man. That would not only be dangerous to the traditional faith, which would particularly concern the Pharisees, but it might ferment trouble politically, which would be of greater interest to the Sadducees. This group of Jews report the incident to the Pharisees who apparently consult with the chief priests (Sadducees) and together they call a meeting of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin.

On this occasion it is the Sadducees who dominate the discussion. Their concern is that the success of Jesus will create a following which could look like, and even become, a rebellion against the Roman rule. The Romans would act ruthlessly to put that down and this might very well mean that they would destroy what these members of the Sanhedrin describe as their 'place'. Many versions translate this as 'Holy Place' and some have 'temple'. However, the word can have the meaning 'position' as in Luke 14:9 where Jesus exhorts us to take the lowest place so that we will not be humiliated if someone more important comes along and we are asked to move and give place to him. If, as the majority of scholars believe, in this context it does mean the Holy Place, nevertheless, the destruction of the temple would inevitably lead to a diminution of the priesthood. The Romans might also do away with the whole Jewish nation. Ironically the fear expressed by the Sanhedrin is exactly what did happen in AD 70, but not because of Jesus.

49-50. The Sadducees were known to be dictatorial and brusque in their manner as revealed here by Caiaphas, the high priest. He dominates the discussion by the imposition of his own views. His thinking is that it is better that Jesus should die rather than provoke the Romans into action that would virtually destroy the Jewish nation.

51-52. John then inserts his own comment - something he had come to understand over the years. This remark made by Caiaphas reflects the gospel. The desire of God is that mankind should not perish but have eternal life. However, there is the great barrier of sin. God's eyes are too pure to look on evil (Hab. 1:13) and before Jesus can fulfil his offer of eternal life he must deal with sin, and that will cost him his life. Without the sacrifice of himself, mankind will perish. As John comments, the effect of the death of Christ is spread far wider than the Jewish nation; the offer is made to everyone but only those who become the children of God by belief in the name of Jesus (1:12) receive it.

John's reasoning is interesting. He goes beyond stating that the remark of Caiaphas happens to encapsulate the gospel. He relates it to his role as high priest. Failure and rogue as he is, nevertheless God uses his position to speak through him on this occasion. Of course, that does not mean that everything he says as high priest is from God. The Lord is sovereign and he can use anyone and everyone to fulfil his purpose in spite of themselves, if he so desires.

53. There were previous plots to kill Jesus (e.g. 7:1), but apparently this now becomes the agreed policy of the Sanhedrin.

54. The time for the death of Jesus was very near but had not yet come and so he withdraws from public life and goes to a remote village together with his disciples. No one is sure where Ephraim was situated - possibly north of Jerusalem.

55-57. Before taking part in the religious feasts it was necessary to go through a form of ritual purification and so people went up to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to complete these formalities in good time. John mentions in particular those from the country. It was these people, more than the town dwellers amongst whom Jesus had walked and taught and worked most of his miracles, so it was they who gave him the most support. No doubt news of the raising of Lazarus had spread and so there would be great interest in catching a glimpse of the man who had done this. On the other hand, the Jewish authorities had issued an order that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report the fact so that they might arrest him. Probably they had offered a reward; certainly Judas negotiated a payment in return for information. In the light of this, the country people, as they stood in groups in the temple area where the purification rites took place, discussed whether Jesus would come to the feast. The way John words their comments implies that the expectation was that he would not risk it.

The Sanhedrin had decided that Jesus must die. However, it was necessary to do this in an acceptable manner with a proper trial, even if the verdict was already fixed. Therefore they needed first to arrest Jesus rather than simply arrange for a sudden assassination.

## Chapter 12

1-3. These few verses give rise to problems and speculations. Luke doesn't mention this event at all, which is surprising as he alone has recounted the occasion when Jesus and his disciples visited the home of Martha and Mary (he makes no mention of Lazarus). Matthew says only that Jesus spent the night at Bethany. Mark records that when Jesus was having a meal at Bethany an unnamed woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume of pure nard, broke it and poured the perfume over the head of Jesus. He records the comment of some of those present that the perfume should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. He adds the information that this took place in the home of Simon the Leper. (Bear this fact in mind – it was at the house of a man who was a leper. It will assume importance later)

An added complication is that Luke has recorded (7:36 ff.) an incident when Jesus had been invited to a meal in the home of a Pharisee (also named Simon) when a woman, known to be a sinner, came in bringing an alabaster jar of perfume, wept so profusely that she wet the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair and then poured perfume on them. This led to a discussion about the fact that his host had not offered water to wash his feet, following which Jesus pronounced forgiveness of her sins - much to the consternation of the other guests. Because of the many similarities between this story of Luke and that recorded here by John, many commentators assume that they are different versions of the same event. However, if that is so, then Mary was a woman with a wide reputation as a sinner. Not only does that not fit the picture we have of Mary elsewhere but, when Luke later recounts (10:38 ff.) the story of Jesus visiting Martha and Mary, he introduces them as new characters when we would expect him to say something to the effect that, "Mary was the woman who had washed the feet of Jesus with her tears;" but he does not. What is more, it is unlikely that many Jews would have come to Martha and Mary to comfort them on the loss of their brother (11:19) if Mary had been a notorious sinner.

After reading the theories of several commentators let me add my own.

This dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Presumably the disciples would be there and probably some other friends of Lazarus who rejoiced at his restoration from death. It is most unlikely that they would enter the house of a man who was a leper. Assuming Simon was still alive we must also assume, therefore, that he had been cured of his leprosy. Perhaps, and I say no more than that, he had been healed by Jesus. But why should Martha prepare the meal in someone else's home rather than her own, especially as we know it had been able to accommodate Jesus and his disciples on a previous occasion? Add to all this that it seems that Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived together and were all unmarried; a most unusual situation for all three in those days.

Everything falls into place if Simon were the father of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He was a leper healed by Jesus. It was this which had made Jesus so welcome at that home and which had prompted the sisters to remark that had Jesus been there when Lazarus fell ill he would not have died - they had seen him heal their father. If the objection is raised, "Why did the mourners say, 'could not he who opened the eyes of a blind man have kept this man from dying?'" when it would have been more relevant to ask, "Why could not he who healed Simon, the father, from leprosy have kept his son from dying?" The answer is that John selects only seven signs in his gospel and each for a specific purpose. He had already mentioned the healing of the blind man but could not refer to the healing of Simon without further detailed explanation, which would distract attention from his main purpose of reporting the raising of Lazarus. Indeed, in that purpose it is unnecessary for John to bring Simon into the story at all; it is Mark who mentions him. What is more, if Simon had been a leper it is understandable that his children were unmarried, although if he had been healed presumably the situation might now change. After all, that healing would have been recent because the total ministry of Jesus lasted only three years. If Simon was the father of the three, then his home is also their home, and Martha prepared the meal in her own kitchen.

There is no reason why both the Pharisee of Luke chapter 7 and the householder here should not both be called Simon; it was a common name, and it stretches the imagination to believe that the judgmental Pharisee

who provided no true hospitality for Jesus should also be the leper (albeit recently cured) who welcomed him into his home for a celebration meal to honour him.

This leaves only the problem of two different women performing the most unusual identical action of anointing Jesus with perfume and drying his feet with their hair. Can that really have happened twice? Yes indeed; it may well have been a deliberate act of imitation on Mary's part. She would have heard of what had happened when a woman under conviction of her sin had come in penitence, probably with no intention of washing Jesus' feet but simply to anoint him with perfumed oil. However, kneeling before him and overcome with remorse, her tears fell on his feet which she quickly and spontaneously wiped away with her hair, before anointing them with some of the perfume from the jar. On the occasion of this meal, Mary was not a penitent sinner (there is no mention of tears) but a woman overcome with gratitude and love for this wonderful man who had healed her father, restored her brother to life and seemed to understand her better than she understood herself. She longed to express that love and gratitude and, recalling what that woman had done, she remembered that she also had some precious ointment (worth a year's wages - was she keeping it in hope of her own marriage?). She fetches it and with glorious abandon breaks the seal or even the jar itself, and pours the whole contents over Jesus, drying his feet with her hair, just as that unnamed woman had done. It would also be much easier for Mary to fetch the perfume if she were in her own home than if they were all in another house elsewhere in the village; although that would, of course, be possible.

Whatever the truth of the situation and wherever the dinner was held, this must have been a very precious memory for John. Soon everything was to turn horrendous, but that day must have been one of the very happiest he and the other disciples had spent with Jesus. The phrase, "Lazarus was among those... with him," is so full of meaning. Just think what that meal would have been like had Lazarus still been in the tomb. There would have been an empty chair, if not in fact then in the hearts of all who were there. As it was, the family was together and there was so much joy. John records the fact that the fragrance of the perfume filled the whole house as though he could still recall the actual scent in his mind. Surely he intends to convey the truth that an act of love performed for Jesus spreads far beyond the intended beneficiary.

4-6. However, even in the midst of so much joy there was one unhappy incident. Judas Iscariot raised an objection. He sought to undermine that wonderful and spontaneous act of self-giving love on the part of Mary and suggested that the tremendously expensive perfume should have been sold and the proceeds given the poor. The fact is that on a purely practical and logical level, there is more than a little good sense in what he said. But John contrasts the motives of Mary and Judas by the revelation, which none of the other gospels mentions, that Judas was a thief. He was the treasurer for the band of disciples with Jesus, but used to help himself to the funds. He wasn't really interested in the poor, but had the perfume been sold, he personally would have had access to the proceeds. The fact that Judas was a thief must have come to light only later because, even if Jesus knew (as probably he did), it is not really believable that any of the disciples was aware of it and permitted it to continue. We cannot guess how it was discovered. The astonishing thing is the trust that Jesus showed towards Judas. John records (6:70-71) that long before, Jesus had known that Judas would prove traitor. Yet his attitude towards him was no different from that he showed to the other eleven. It is consistent with what we now know of Judas that whereas Mary spontaneously gave the ointment in abandon, he had already mentally calculated the value of it.

7-8. Jesus reads Mary's heart and, as previously when Martha had asked Jesus to tell her to come and help serve their guests, he comes to her defence. The words which John records Jesus spoke cause some difficulty. It looks as though he is saying that the perfume is (or was) to be kept for the day of his burial. But this is a week ahead of that. Some commentators read into this that Mary had kept back some of the ointment and that she should not be criticised when later she would use it to anoint his dead body. However, this would conflict with Mark 14:3 where it is recorded that the woman (Mary) broke the jar. It is probably best to see this as a symbolic anointing of his dead body. In no way does this detract from the spontaneous gesture on Mary's part, but it sets that act within a greater purpose of God. God's time scale is not as literal as ours. However happy this dinner party was, Jesus must have been very aware of the terrible ordeal which he was about to undergo. In less than a week he would be on the cross. To him this anointing was within the total context of his passion.

9-11. Jerusalem would be filling up with people arriving for the Passover. Many, if they had not heard of the raising of Lazarus already, would hear of it now. When the news spread that Jesus had been seen at Bethany, a large number of them made their way there in the hope of catching sight of him. In any case, it was worth going because that was where Lazarus lived and they would be more than interested to see him walking around after being in the tomb four days. The senior priests then decided that it would be good if Lazarus were killed as well because he was a living witness to the power of Jesus and many Jews were going over to Jesus, believing in him, because of Lazarus. In fact, of course, once they had Jesus executed, they saw no need to take action against Lazarus - who would believe in a dead miracle worker?

12-19. It seems probable that the meal was held on the Saturday, after the Sabbath ended that evening, so 'the next day' would be the Sunday. There are at least two separate groups involved in this story, possibly three or even four. First there is the crowd who start off with Jesus from Bethany. Some of these would have been present when Lazarus was raised and, hearing that Jesus was back with the family, had gone to be with him. (Probably these included those mentioned in v.9.) Then there were those (12) who had come to Jerusalem for the feast and had heard the report of Jesus raising Lazarus but had not joined those who had gone to Bethany. Hearing that Jesus was actually on the way to Jerusalem, they went out to greet him, cutting down palm branches and (according to the synoptics) strewing the road with them as though he were some victorious general entering the city in triumph. It seems that some of the Bethany group ran on ahead and continued to spread the word of the raising of Lazarus to those who had not already heard of it, and that Jesus, who had performed the miracle, was even now about to enter the city (17). So yet others went out to meet him (18). It may well be that a further group who had come from Galilee, where Jesus was so popular, had also joined those accompanying Jesus from Bethany.

The shouts of the crowd are revealing. "Hosanna," means "save now". Barclay comments that it is like our "God save the king." The quotation from psalm 118, which was believed to relate to the Messiah, are words used to greet a conqueror, and "Blessed is the King of Israel," speaks for itself. The people were placing Jesus in the role of Saviour and Messiah and, by riding into the city on a colt he, himself, was deliberately fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah about the coming king. However, he was also revealing the type of his kingship and therefore of his kingdom. To our minds we would regard riding on a donkey as far inferior to riding on a horse. That would not be the case in those times. However, it did carry a very real significance. A king riding on a horse was prepared for war; if he rode a donkey it was a sign of peace.

John says that he and the other disciples did not appreciate the significance of these details at the time. It was only after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that they understood that the Scriptures foretold it. In fact it was the other way round. John phrases it as though the events had already happened and then the Scriptures were founded upon it.

The Pharisees became desperate. All their efforts were proving to be useless - "The whole world is going after him."

20-22. John takes up their comment by reporting that there were some Greeks at the Feast. The wording implies that it was not that they just happened to be there at that time, but that they had come to worship. If this is so then most likely they would be proselytes; converts to Judaism but not allowed to enter the temple beyond the court of the Gentiles. Greeks, as a people, were far more open to new ideas than the Jews; the latter concentrating on understanding greater depths of the ancient law. We do not know why they chose to approach Philip rather than any of the other disciples. It may be because he bore a Greek name or simply because he happened to be the first of the disciples they came across. They greeted him with respect and said, "Sir we would see Jesus." Obviously this means more than to look upon him, it is a request for an interview. They had heard about him, perhaps even listened to him, and were intrigued by what they had heard. This caused a problem for Philip. Jesus had said that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24). So Philip consults with Andrew and the two of them decide to tell Jesus.

23-26. The effect on Jesus is surprising. On a number of previous occasions he has said, or John has commented, that his time had not yet come (2:24, 7:6, 7:8, 7:30, 8:20). Now, he sees this request from the Greeks as the sign that his time has come. He had confined his ministry to the Jews but with the underlying purpose that they should be the means of spreading the truth throughout the world (cf. 10:16). Here representatives of the world were asking for him. The world was ready to receive him and his gospel: the time has come for him to provide that gospel; he must die for mankind.

Jesus refers to his glorification. What is glory? In the Old Testament it carries the idea of 'weight'. Yet there is also the impression of a bright and shining light; the face of Moses shone when he had been in the presence of the Lord. It is difficult to explain or describe because there is nothing to which we can liken it. We can speak more easily of its effect than what it is. We can talk of wonder, splendour and awe. Perhaps we would do better to discover what produces it. The immediate answer, of course, is that it is the nature of God; who he is in himself. However, scripture speaks of Jesus 'entering' his glory (Lk .24:26) and, here, of his 'being glorified'. It seems that glory is to do with self-giving and humility. In this it is the exact opposite of the way of the world. To gain glory in the eyes of the world you have to push yourself forward, to impose yourself on a situation. In the cross, the greatest illustration we on earth have of the glory of God, Jesus did not impose himself on the situation, he allowed men to do as they would with him. He won by losing - ridiculous in the world's eyes. However, it is important not to confuse this with weakness. A weak person is not showing humility, only ineffectiveness. Jesus gave his life as a deliberate act from a position of strength. It is the nature of God to give. He gave himself to his people under the Old Covenant. Jesus gave up his position in heaven in order to become man. All through his earthly life he gave, gave, gave of himself. Finally and supremely he gave himself up to die. It is this self-giving, this humility, which somehow produces glory. It isn't seen with the human eye (although its effect was manifested in the shining of the face of Moses) but with the eye of faith (cf. 17:24).

That his glorification has to do with self-sacrifice is confirmed by the words which immediately follow. The grain of wheat has to die in order to produce more of its kind. It is a brilliant analogy but, as with all analogies, it runs out of its usefulness if it is pushed too far. A seed does indeed produce more but does not itself survive. Jesus does survive, not simply in the fruit he produces but as himself, although in a different and more glorious form - the resurrection life. Again, the underlying truth John is proclaiming is the reality of the unseen spiritual realm. What Jesus has just expounded is a universal truth; it does not apply only to him, although he is the fullest illustration of it. Anyone and everyone who seeks to hold onto what he has, especially his life, will lose it. It is only by self-giving that you can keep it. This does not refer only to death - that is simply the culmination. The way to live the whole of life is in self-giving: this is the back-to-front law of the eternal kingdom. It does not make sense to the world where, if you want something, you grab it and then grasp it firmly to keep it. This is the fundamental principle of creation which Paul understood so clearly when he wrote, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name," (Phil. 2:5-9). He humbled himself and gave his life. This humility and self-sacrifice resulted in his being exalted beyond even what he had before.

And so the one who would be where Jesus is, in that glorious and eternal realm, must follow the way of humility and self-giving which he lived out in heaven and on earth. Such is the true servant and such will the Father honour as he honoured the Son.

27. John does not record the agony in the garden of Gethsemane (although he hints at it (18:1, 11). Probably this is for a similar reason that he does not record details of the birth of Jesus, nor of the temptation in the wilderness, nor of the transfiguration; these are specific events which epitomise wider truths which Jesus revealed throughout the whole of his ministry. Jesus lived the whole of his life in the shadow of the cross, the burden of it was with him always. John's purpose is to show the constant conflict between the way of the world and the way of the kingdom. To highlight the comparatively brief time of agony in the garden might

convey the impression that only then, at the very end of his life, did Jesus face and feel the horror of the cross. What Jesus calls us to is a total way of life which is always in conflict with the world.

Nevertheless, however deep the shadow cast by the cross, when the time came to face it of course the horror of it struck Jesus afresh with a more immediate intensity. To say that his heart or his soul was troubled means simply that he was troubled. The soul is that part of us which thinks, feels and decides; it is the person, the 'me', who inhabits and expresses itself through my body. So this is John's equivalent to the agony in the garden. He is not denying that that ever happened; he was one of those who were there, but, as always with him, he seeks to convey the meaning of the event.

The N.I.V. together with most modern translations, including the New King James, opens this verse with two questions. The original King James does not have the second question mark. My own feeling is that it is right to have it. The request, "Father, save me from this hour," parallels the cry in the garden, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me." The fact that the latter is followed by, "Yet not my will, but yours be done," is echoed here in John if the question mark is included - Jesus asks only if he should request to be spared the ordeal, but immediately rejects that. The point John wants to convey is that with the whole of his being Jesus shrank from the cross. It was only his love for mankind and the utter dedication of his will to obey his Father, that carried him through. I said that the soul is that part of us which thinks, feels and decides. Here we see all three at work. He thinks, should he ask to be spared the ordeal? No, because reason testifies that this (to give his life) was the culminating purpose of his coming. He feels, he dreads the cross, yet he loves the Father and also all of mankind. He exercises his will and decides to embrace the way his Father desires, and he cries...

28-29. "Father, glorify your name." As I have said, the way of glory is the way of humility and self sacrifice and so Jesus will go to the cross. The response of the Father from the spiritual realm breaks through into the physical, material world. The crowd hear a noise which they cannot accurately identify. It is sufficiently like thunder for some to claim that that is what it was; others do not agree but claim that it was the voice of an angel speaking to Jesus, although, it seems, they do not hear any words themselves. It is similar to what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-7, 22:6-9, 26:13-14 - all three accounts need to be read to understand the whole event), only he heard the words of the Lord, so here it is only Jesus, apparently, who hears the actual words of his Father.

30. Jesus states that the voice was for the benefit of the crowd not himself. How can that be when they did not distinguish what the voice said? The point is that they had heard what Christ had said and they understood that it had motivated an immediate response from his Father. His words were not some idle yearning and had not dissipated into thin air; God had heard him! No doubt the actual words of the Father were an encouragement to Jesus, but he did not need to hear them as, perhaps, in his humanity he needed to hear the voice at his baptism confirming that he was indeed following the right path; he is God's Son and his Father delights in him. During his ministry Jesus had become more and more certain of his Father's presence and will. He was totally confident that the cross was the way the Father had prepared for him to go.

31. From a human point of view the time had come for the judgement of Jesus; he was to be brought before the Sanhedrin, before Herod and before Pilate and sentence would be passed on him. In fact, of course, it was the world that was being judged. The Creator of all things, the ultimate source of all that is, had entered his own creation and his creatures decided he didn't fit, there was no place for such as him in the world. Creatures judged Creator, time judged eternity, death judged life; it is ridiculous but it happened.

It would be very arrogant of us to assume that the life-forms we see on earth, animal species including our own, are the only forms of being. Scripture speaks of angels, cherubim and seraphim etc. and it is remarkably consistent throughout its different books in detailing spiritual forces which, although created perfect by God, are now in defiance of him. It speaks of angels watching over children (Matt. 18:10), over churches (Rev. 2 & 3) and of 'princes' over principalities or nations (Dan. 10). There is also a more senior angel, Lucifer, who was originally a great angel of light, appointed over this world. Somewhere along the line he rebelled against his Creator and is now known as the adversary or the Satan. This is not the place to debate just how literally we are to take these descriptions; what is important is that Scripture, including John himself, teaches the

reality of spiritual warfare between God and forces originally created by him for good and which are now in rebellion against him. God is consistent and, having set Lucifer over this world, he does not immediately destroy him in his rebellion, he will overcome him using only weapons appropriate to his character of love and holiness. The Satan has persuaded mankind to disobey, and has mankind's allegiance. God will not force mankind to obey but will win us back by unconditional love. That love, eternally active, is to be epitomised and concentrated through the cross. So, as Jesus determines to face his crucifixion, he proclaims, "Now the prince of this world will be driven out." He will not yet be destroyed, that is to come, but the way will be opened for mankind to return to God and enter eternity. Satan's hold over us will be broken.

32-33. Jesus immediately goes on to show the means by which this victory will be attained. He will draw mankind's allegiance away from Satan to himself by being lifted up. This is not a reference to the ascension but to the cross as v.33 makes clear. The ascension is another great event which John does not mention, probably for two reasons: first, he himself was so conscious of the presence of Jesus with him and wanted others to share this that to stress so vividly Jesus going away from the earth might prove a hindrance to this understanding. However, it would be even more wrong if his omission created the impression that Jesus is not in the heavenly realm and so he records his words about leaving the world and coming to the Father (17:11). Secondly, John saw the lifting up of Jesus on the cross as the cause of Satan's defeat; the ascension was the consequence of the victory won there.

In the end, what will (and does) gain the allegiance of mankind is not force with its corollary of fear, but unconditional love. The basic need of each person is self-worth - to feel that 'I' matter. Because this need is not met, or rather not felt to be met, some cower and seek to hide, while others are driven to aggressive self-assertion to obtain power in order to prove, apparently to others but actually to themselves, that they do matter. Christ on the cross is the sign beyond all others that I matter to him; he went through that in order to have me with him in all eternity. Of course, that is not immediately obvious. I need insight to appreciate it, and even when I do, the depth of its significance can never be plumbed in this life. But the many faceted attraction of the cross has drawn, and continues to draw, men and women from all nations to Jesus.

34. When Philip told Jesus of the request of the Greeks, which prompted Jesus to speak of the Son of Man being glorified (23), he was already in the midst of a crowd some of whom, if not all, would have heard him. They knew enough about what Jesus had been teaching to understand that he used the term 'the Son of Man' of himself and that this was identified with 'the Christ'. It is clear also that they realised that the reference to being lifted up referred to his death. They believed that the Christ was to remain for ever, so how did all this hang together? There is no indication here that they accepted Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, they just couldn't follow the argument. So they seek an explanation, who is this 'Son of Man'? (cf. comment on 1:51 and 3:13)

35-36. Jesus does not give a direct answer to their question but he shows the only way that they can find the answer for themselves; put their trust in him. This is still the only way to discover just who Jesus is. Words and explanations can lead us only so far. Finally we have to make the leap of faith. There is a very real sense in which it is like a parachute jump. The principles can be explained and we may make practice jumps from a platform, but we will not know the reality until we make that leap. We may do it in the company of others but we have to do it individually and for ourselves.

Jesus has already claimed to be the light of the world, (8:12, 9:5) and is about to do so again (12:46). He will be with them for only a very short time now - two or three days at the most. For those to whom he was speaking that was the literal truth but, as always, John records this statement of Jesus for a deeper reason. He speaks those same words today. Although in theory we have the whole of our lifetime in which to respond to Jesus, it seems that there are certain times only when he 'passes by'. There is a particular occasion when the opportunity is especially real. It is as though he calls us by name to follow him. To refuse and turn away, perhaps with the thought, "I will consider it (or do it) later", seems to harden the heart and make it less likely that we shall respond on a future occasion; perhaps there will be no future occasion. What is more, it isn't enough to give a mental assent that Jesus is who he claims to be, we have to walk in that light, put our trust in

it, that is in him. As we do, so the way that we walk becomes a demonstration to those who see us; Jesus can be seen in us, and so we become 'children of light'

Once again, John is stressing the truth revealed in Jesus that without the light which comes from the eternal realm and which shines through him, we have no purpose and therefore we do not know which direction to take. We are in the dark and do not know where we are going.

The public ministry of Jesus has ended and he now goes into hiding until the time he allows Judas to betray him. John will record a further description of his teaching (44-50) which may have been in the presence of his friends only, or it may have formed part of his public ministry - in which case, John is reporting something which had already happened, in order to explain more about the unbelief of the Jews.

37-41. There is a sense of astonishment on John's part as he records that in spite of the fact that Jesus had performed so many signs (John will declare in 20:30 that Jesus did many more miracles than the seven he has selected) the Jews still would not believe in him. It was not simply that they did not, they would not; it was an act of will. They understood enough to realise that to accept the truth that these signs pointed to would mean they must surrender their tradition and their position, and the cost was too great. But this is nothing new, Isaiah had experienced the same hardness of heart in those to whom he declared the truth in his time.

There is a moral problem raised by John's own comment (39) and that of Isaiah whom he quotes (40). Does God deliberately prevent people from believing in him and then judge them for their unbelief. Because God is omnipotent we must accept that he could have done this, but that would be unjust. We may be only creatures and our sense of justice may be limited, but it is not false. Abraham challenged the Lord on a similar issue (Gen. 18:23/5) and God rewarded him for daring to voice his objection. God does not deliberately 'blind' the eyes of anyone. It is, however, an in-built law of creation that a person who shuts his eyes will not see where he or she is going. That is not due to the intervention of God but it is due to the way he has ordered creation; in that sense he is responsible for their blindness. God "wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4) But he confirms and highlights the choice a man or woman has already made. It is foolish for a person deliberately to reject the truth once perceived, in the belief that they may be able accept it later in life and be saved..

Nevertheless, God is sovereign and he can use even unbelief to his glory. It is because of the unbelief of these Jews that Jesus was sent to the cross. Once again there is the apparent conflict between freewill and predestination. Jesus is quite clear, however that the two have to be held in tension. "The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him". (Luke 22:22) In betraying Jesus, Judas helped to fulfil God's will but he will be held totally responsible for his action.

Under the old covenant God, Yahweh, was believed to be the only God. The doctrine of the Trinity, although hinted at, was not developed. Isaiah, prophesied about a suffering servant to come, but did not see him as God. However, John has no hesitation in saying that the glory of God which Isaiah saw was the glory of Jesus and that he was, in fact, writing about him.

42-43. John is careful to explain that although the majority of Jews, especially those with authority, did not believe in Jesus, there were some who did, even amongst the leaders. However, these were not willing to declare their faith openly because they were afraid; in particular they feared they would be put out of the synagogue. John makes the telling comment that they loved praise from men more than praise from God. Surely, this is something we all know. We want to be accepted. No one enjoys being shunned and made to feel an outcast. Again, we are brought back to the matter of faith. What do we really believe and are we willing to act on it?

44-45. Jesus declares the essential unity of the Godhead. Underlying this is the doctrine of the Trinity. In one sense, in his earthly ministry, Jesus is an empty vessel. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me... then I said, 'Here I am - it is written about me in the

scroll - I have come to do your will, O God.'" (Heb 10:5-7) He has been given a human body which he uses not to fulfil his own desires but to do the will of his Father. The Holy Spirit works unhindered in him. He is a window through which we can see the Father. However, that is only part of the truth. He is not only an empty vessel. His own character and will are involved and perfectly replicate that of the Father. Jesus and the Father are so closely united that to believe in the one is to believe in the other.

Belief into the Godhead is not something we observe from a distance; that belief brings us within the circle of the eternal reality. More than that, that reality enters us. We have a new understanding of why we are. Until then our understanding is darkened but the believer does not remain in darkness; Jesus brings light.

47-50. Jesus makes it clear that his purpose in coming is to save. God, the Trinity, loves within himself; that is to say (as far as we can describe it using terms of humankind) each 'person' loves and is loved by the other two. This love is, therefore, self generating; it grows, it expands. So, in that love, God created mankind that he might have yet more to love and more to love him. Mankind rebelled against that love and we decided to strike out on our own. This, at root, is what sin is, seeking independence from our creator. God is eternally expressing himself in re-creation and redemption - seeking always to restore the original relationship. That is why Jesus came - to bring us back to God. Of course, that means that the sin we have committed has to be dealt with, and we must not minimise what it cost to do it - the death of Jesus on the cross. However, that is only the means to the end. The purpose was restoration - Jesus did not come for a legalistic reason, that is for judgement, he came that we might have life and have it in abundance. We have already seen that a word is a means of self expression and Jesus spoke the word of salvation and is the Word. It is not intended to be the word of judgement. However, if a person rejects that word which would save him or her, then that word inevitably judges them; they have chosen to remain in darkness rather than step into the light. In the final analysis, that is 'at the last day', their rejection of the word will be revealed for what it is. In that sense that word will be their judge.

However, the word is not impersonal; as we have seen, it is the expression of the living God. Jesus explains that the words he has spoken are not of his own making. In his earthly ministry he relayed what he had heard from his Father without the intervention of his own views. That is not to say that his own views were in conflict with the Father, it is to do with the emptying of himself and becoming fully man. He had only a human brain (see note on 44 above). On earth his role was not to set forth his own will but that of his Father; in other words, to be obedient. Again, that is not to say that he had ever been disobedient in his prior relationship with his Father. The possibility for that had never arisen; they were in perfect harmony and unity. To put it in human terms, it had never occurred to him to be disobedient and consequently he did not know what it was to be obedient. This was the situation of Adam before the fall - it was only after he had sinned that he realised his previous state and discovered that he was naked. Jesus came to reverse the first and fatal act of disobedience by being perfectly obedient. This is what the writer of Hebrews was seeking to explain when he said, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb 5:8).

So, on earth in a human body, Jesus lacked the eternal perspective he had enjoyed in heaven. He had to rely on guidance from his heavenly Father given him by the indwelling Holy Spirit. (The manner in which the Father dwelt in Jesus was in the person of the Holy Spirit.) His task on earth was simply to obey what the Father told him to do and to say. Jesus explains that by stating that the words he speaks are not what he has made up himself but are what has been given him to say by the Father.

The final verse contains a profound truth. N.I.V. is in error when it says that the command of the Father leads to eternal life. That implies something that will happen in the future. Jesus actually said that the Father's command is eternal life. The expression of the Father brings that eternal realm which exists already and which runs parallel to this one, at least for a time, into our present life. Jesus does not specify which command he has in mind. Perhaps it is helpful to translate the word as 'precept' on this occasion. It isn't a matter of keeping a particular commandment or series of commandments. It is the principle which he is even now illustrating as he speaks. Eternal life is to walk according to what the Father is constantly expressing. It is to live for him. That is what the kingdom of God is all about. That is what is happening in heaven, and if we are living like that

here and now, then we are living in the truth, the reality which eternally is. This command, this precept is eternal life.

## Chapter 13

1. Scholars differ as to whether there is a conflict between John and the synoptic gospels regarding the day on which the Passover meal was eaten. One of the causes of this is the statement in 18:28 that the Jews did not enter the palace for fear of ceremonial defilement which would prevent them being able to eat the Passover. This event clearly happened on the day on which Jesus was crucified - the Friday. If, as this implies, the Passover was to be eaten on the Friday, then Jesus and his disciples had kept the feast a day earlier than everyone else, which was to breach the law. Obviously there is a problem here and commentators seek to solve it in a variety of ways. The reasoning is complicated and detailed and I do not intend to go into it in any depth. Having raised the problem of 18:28, however, I would mention two possible ways of reconciling that statement with the assumption that the correct day for eating the Passover was the Thursday: 1. The term 'The Passover' (or 'The Feast') refers to the whole seven day period; much in the same way that we ask "Where are you spending Christmas?" meaning more than just Christmas day itself. Thus having already eaten the main Passover meal on the Thursday, these leading Jews did not want to be ceremonially prevented from eating one of the subsidiary meals (the Chagigah?) on the Friday. 2. The members of the Sanhedrin (who were the only ones referred to under the term 'the Jews' in 18:28) had been too busily involved with Judas in the arrest of Jesus and then his subsequent 'trials' on the previous night, to eat the Passover then. So they were determined to eat it on the Friday. This would have been a serious breach of the law but apparently they were prepared to allow themselves this in their desire to get rid of Jesus. Be all that as it may, so far as John is concerned, Jesus and the disciples celebrated the Passover on the Thursday evening.

Once again, as with the story of the healing of the man born blind in chapter 7, John writes the story of the Passover meal with a high sense of drama. We, the audience, are let in on the secret that Jesus knows he has reached the end of his earthly ministry. These are the few last hours he will spend with his disciples. God he may be, and as such he loves the whole world, but in his humanity (if it is permissible to speak in terms which appear to separate his two 'natures' - human and divine; and the phrase, 'his own who were in the world,' encourages us to some such understanding) he has come to love these twelve men in a special way. John builds up the drama by telling us that Jesus is about to show them, and us, how far his love will go - to the uttermost, there is no limit. They have been with him through so many experiences and things will never be quite the same in the future; their Rabbi will assume his true position as the King of glory. He is leaving the world to return to the Father. Jesus knows this and so do we, even if we cannot understand it fully, but the disciples do not. That is one part of the drama.

2. Contrasted with that love there is hatred. It is personified in Judas Iscariot but the real battle is with the devil, the prince of darkness, who had worked upon that disciple; no doubt finding opportunity due to the fact that already he was living in deceit (12:6). Once again, in the way that John unfolds the drama, we know of the decision of Judas to betray Jesus and so does Jesus himself but the disciples, apart of course from Judas, do not.

3-5. There is something else that John does not tell us but which Luke does; at the meal an argument arose amongst the disciples as to which of them was the most important (Luke 22:24). Luke mentions this after he has described what happened at the meal but, of course, that may be because he does not want to interrupt his description of the institution of the Last Supper, and the dispute may well have arisen earlier. Indeed it is difficult to imagine it arising after what Jesus was now to teach them. We cannot know why John does not record it - perhaps because he felt it would detract from what Jesus was about to do if it was seen only as a response to the behaviour of the disciples, whereas it was part of the nature of Jesus always to give of himself in every way. John implies a different reason for Jesus' action. He says that Jesus knew and was confident about three things: 1. The Father had given him authority and power over everything. 2. He had come from God and the heavenly realm he inhabits. 3. He was about to return to God. In other words, he had total personal security; he knew exactly who he was and where he stood in the Father's regard for him. He had no doubt of his self-worth. From the way he words it John stresses the fact that it was because of this knowledge and self confidence (NIV actually inserts the word 'so'), Jesus performed the menial act of washing the feet of his disciples. The reason why the disciples were arguing about who was greatest is the reason why the majority of

people today seek to impress others - we doubt our self worth. We feel that no one else will recognise our importance so we seek to impose it. It is the person who is totally secure in his or her self-worth who is free to be the true servant of others. If we only believe how precious we are to God, whose opinion alone counts in eternity, we will not be so bothered about what other people think of us and will be prepared to serve rather than dominate them.

It was the recognised custom for a host to provide a servant to wash the feet of his guests. The guests, themselves, would have bathed before setting out but the open sandals, which were in general use at that time, were no protection against the dust of the roads, or mud if it was wet. Although there was no servant, the ewer and basin, together with the towel, were in place. No doubt the disciples studiously avoided 'noticing' them, but the longer time went on the more they would have stood in condemnation of them. It was then that Jesus, their Lord and Master, assumed the role of the missing servant and he washed the feet of each - including Judas Iscariot. Their embarrassment must have been acute. It would have been easier for them to bear a verbal rebuke for their pride than to submit to the action.

6-7. As always, it is Peter who is the first to speak and reveal his embarrassment. He seeks to prevent Jesus from washing his feet. This prompts a remark from Jesus which John carefully records because, as so often, it contains a greater truth than for its immediate occasion. "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand." W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary* is helpful in his comments on this statement.

"In the N. T. 'ginosko' frequently indicates a relation between the person knowing and the object known; in this respect, what is known is of value or importance to the one who knows, and hence the establishment of the relationship, e.g., especially of God's knowledge, 1 Cor. 8:3, 'If any man love God, the same is known of him.'"... "The difference between 'ginosko' and 'oida' demands consideration: 'ginosko' frequently suggests inception or progress i.e. Peter did not yet perceive (oida) its significance, "but thou shalt understand," i.e., 'get to know (ginosko) hereafter.'"

There are so many things that happen in our lives which we neither desire nor understand at the time, but later (often much later) we see what God was doing and it has brought us into a deeper relationship with him. There are some things, of course, that we shall understand only when we stand in glory with our Lord because they will make sense only from that perspective. Until then we are called to trust that the Lord is working his purpose out - but that is what the life of faith is.

8-11. Peter, in his shame, continues to object, saying that he will never permit the Lord to wash his feet. But Jesus now places the matter on a different plane. Until now, it has been confined to two issues; the practical matter of washing dirty feet, and the example (15) of service. He tells Peter that unless he does wash him, he can have no share in his own destiny - cannot partake of the spiritual realm from which Jesus has come, to which he is about to return and which, by his work of humiliation (of which the foot washing is but a part), he is opening to all who believe in him.

So often we see redemption from a legal aspect, which is the principle viewpoint of Paul, who had been trained as a Pharisee, particularly in his letter to the Romans. That is, mankind has broken God's law so justice demands a penalty; the only penalty appropriate is death; Jesus came to take our place; when he was on the cross God laid on him our sin; the penalty has been paid and so we are set free. This is an important aspect of the atonement and, of course, it is true. John, also, implies that truth when he records the Baptist pointing to Jesus and saying, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." However, in his reporting of the words of Jesus he presents sin in a different light. It isn't any less serious, it still completely disqualifies mankind from a place in the eternal kingdom and thus brings eternal death, but it isn't simply a breaking of God's law. It is on a different plane altogether and, in fact, it is far more serious. Think of a family; how poor it would be if it operated only under a sense of duty and legal obligation and where the children were in a perpetual sense of fear that they were failing to please their parents. It ought to be a place of warm relationship. The greatest horror of sin is that it breaks that relationship which, in the eyes of God, is surely far more serious than breaking a law.

Imagine an animal in captivity, kept in a cage by someone who does not care for it. It is not only sick and without hope but it is filthy and stinks. No one can have a relationship with it in that state. It needs not only to be set free, but thoroughly washed and cleaned; it also has to be taught how to live in a new environment and acquire a sense of self-worth and purpose. John presents Jesus as seeing us in a similar light. In the Book of Revelation Jesus appears in all his glory and says, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." [Rev 1:18] He has released us from captivity by coming into the cage and opening the gate from inside. He has washed us, assured us of his love for us and so given us a new sense of self-worth, and he has given us a hope and purpose as he sets us in a new realm. Here, in v.8, he has in mind the aspect of washing and making clean.

Peter does not understand the meaning behind the words of Jesus – indeed, how can he do so before the death and resurrection have taken place and before the coming of the Spirit to lead him into all truth? (As Jesus has remarked in v.7.) In his usual eager and spontaneous manner, Peter switches completely and asks Jesus to wash not only his feet but the whole of him. Jesus patiently explains that guests who have bathed before coming, need only to have their feet washed when they arrive. What he has in mind is that by his coming and choosing them to be with him and to learn from his word, they had already been transferred to the eternal realm. Their spirits had been brought alive by the Holy Spirit and they had already experienced his power by proxy, so to speak, from Jesus himself. Of course, the process had to be completed by the death and rising of Jesus and by the infilling of the Holy Spirit but, because they believed in him who is the resurrection and the life, they were already living in the kingdom of God. They would still fall and commit sins while they walked this earth, (just as the restored animal in the above illustration would get mud on its paws which would have to be cleaned off) but the major transformation had already happened. As Jesus was to explain a little later that evening, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." (15:3)

However, not every one of them was clean. Judas Iscariot was a member of the little band. There is no reason to doubt that when he had been sent out with the rest of the twelve in pairs (so someone must have been his partner) he was any less successful in healing people and even casting out demons than the others. Nevertheless, the word of truth had not really penetrated his heart. He had not crossed over from death to life (5:24), he was too firmly attached to this realm to enter the eternal one to which Jesus belonged. Jesus refers to this but does not name him.

12-17. Peter's reaction had driven Jesus to talk of the redemption he was to win for him. Peter would be lost not because of the fact that his feet would remain unwashed in the literal sense; the problem was his attitude that he was self sufficient (and therefore could win his own salvation) and would not humble himself to receive the salvation which Jesus alone could offer him. Jesus was setting his disciples an example (15) but not in the area of salvation; that was a unique work which only he could perform. So he reverts to the practical, moral and spiritual areas of human life. Had they understood and learnt the lesson he was teaching them in those areas? They regarded him as their teacher and also their Lord (and rightly so). It was to be expected, therefore, that any one of them should have washed his feet, not he theirs: but he had. The lesson he was teaching was far more than good manners, it was to do with the nature of authority. True authority is gained not by domination but service. There are two sides to authority. On the one hand, it is bestowed from above. Someone who has supreme authority delegates a measure of it upon another who, in turn, may delegate a measure of that on someone else. But, on the other hand, that authority has to be recognised and accepted by those who are under it. If the authority has to be enforced by law, it is not true authority, it is akin to tyranny. True authority wins allegiance. The one with the greatest authority is the one who provides the greatest service. The heart of authority, and therefore leadership, is servanthood.

In the final two verses of this section Jesus is not implying that because he is their master they should have washed his feet. As stated above, that is the truth, but that is not the point he is making. Rather it is that he has authority over them and exerts it by serving them. They are his servants and so they are not free to act in a way which is different from the way he acts. A servant cannot behave as though he is above his master anymore than a messenger can change the message. He sends out his disciples with his authority - to serve! If they do this then they will discover that they are blessed.

18. John records that Jesus returned to the remark he had just made that not all are clean (10). He makes it clear to his disciples that he is fully aware that there is a traitor amongst them - he knows the men he has chosen. We may wonder why Jesus chose to have in his little band someone who, he knew, was going to betray him. We cannot be certain. Whilst it may seem that someone had to betray him, that is not necessarily so; presumably the Jewish authorities could have arrested him without Judas. The reason given is that it was to fulfil the 'prophecy' given in Psalm 41:9. Jesus fully identifies with us that we might fully identify with him. Those of us who have experienced the pain of having been let down by someone we thought was our friend can know that Jesus totally understands our feelings; he has experienced it too.. What is clear, however, is that whilst Judas helped to fulfil the Father's plan by betraying Jesus, he is, nonetheless, fully responsible for his own actions: "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." [Mat 26:24]

19-20. To understand something that Jesus did or said, it can be helpful to imagine what would have happened if he had not done or said it. So here, had Jesus not shared with his disciples that he was fully aware that Judas was a traitor, they might later have questioned whether he truly was the person they believed him to be. The Messiah had been duped, so how could he be the Messiah? As it was, they might question why he should have been willing to harbour Judas as one of his followers, but they would not need to doubt that he was fully in control of the situation. Indeed, the very fact that he did know about Judas was further proof that Jesus was indeed sent by God. What is more, having been sent himself he was now commissioning others, beginning with them, the eleven. Just as those who received him received the Father also (12:44), so those who receive the ones he sends will receive both him and the Father. This truth will be explained in further detail in 17:20-26.

21. Twice before, in the course of his explanation, Jesus has told his disciples that someone is going to betray him. Although it is clear to him (and to us, because John has revealed this fact on a number of occasions [6:71,12:4, 13:2]) that it is Judas, it has not really registered with the others that the betrayer is one of themselves, the twelve. The way John words this verse implies that whilst Jesus had known all along that Judas was going to betray him, the enormity of that deed overwhelms him in a deeper manner than before. If John is speaking with careful literalness in saying that it was in his spirit that Jesus was distressed, rather than simply using a common phrase, then it was not simple his soul that was gripped, it went deeper than this. Our spirit is that area of our personality designed for our communion with God. So this is more than just his own emotions as a human being, it involved experiencing the very heart of God. Here is a man, a being created by and for God, about to walk away from eternal life and be lost for ever. So the heart of God, expressed in and through Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is in agony.

22. Here is an eyewitness account; John is reliving the moment. At last the truth has penetrated their minds - one of them is a traitor. They have absolutely no idea which of them it might be and they are dumbfounded.

23-25. When the Passover was instituted the Israelites were instructed to eat it in a manner ready for flight; they were about to flee Egypt. This tradition had been preserved down the years, but when they were truly settled in the promised land the custom had developed of keeping the feast in an exaggeratedly relaxed manner. They would deliberately 'loll about'. Even though they were now living under an occupation by the Romans, that custom continued. At the meal the participants would lean on their left side, leaving their right arms and hands free to deal with the food and drink. Thus a person on the right of another would have his head leaning towards his neighbour on the left - "in his bosom." Although a number of suggestions have been made as to who, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" might be, it is overwhelmingly believed to refer to John himself. (see 21:20 and 24). If this is so, then John would be reclining on Jesus's right and it would be easy for him to look up into the face of his Lord and speak to him. Because of the restricted movement caused by reclining on the left arm, Judas must have been very near to Jesus for the latter to be able to offer him the piece of bread; probably he was on his left. This was a place of honour. John's sense of drama is revealed again in the careful manner in which he describes the scene. Peter attracts John's attention by motioning to him and

quietly, possibly mouthing the words, encourages him to ask Jesus which of them he means; which is what he does.

26. It is obvious that the great majority of the disciples do not understand what is happening - when Judas goes out to betray Jesus the others believe he is fulfilling some legitimate errand. Had they understood we may wonder if Judas would have got out alive, let alone be permitted to fulfil his errand. We must assume, therefore, that the latter part of this conversation was conducted so quietly that only those very close to Jesus could hear it. Perhaps the statement of Jesus that one of them was to betray him, after an initial shocked silence, had provoked discussion, and it was against this background that the drama between Jesus, Judas (on his left) and John (on his right) was played out.

26. Some commentators do not believe that there was any significance of giving honour to someone by offering them a selected morsel; in these circumstances it was just a means by which Jesus could indicate which of them he meant. The majority, however, refer to the eastern custom of giving such recognition to an honoured guest. Any such significance is of little relevance, in fact, in the light of the psychological interplay between Jesus and Judas. By his action Jesus was revealing that he had known all along what Judas had been planning, even to the detail that it was this very night that he had arranged with the Jewish leaders to betray him. Perhaps Judas realised in a flash of understanding that the mysterious manner in which Jesus had arranged the venue for the Passover meal (sending just two of his disciples to follow a man with a water pitcher - Mark 14:12-15) was a deliberate plan to prevent him knowing of it in advance, and thus enabling the priests to arrest Jesus quietly in the privacy of the room. It was vital that the institution of the Lord's Supper should not be disturbed.

27-29. For a moment Judas's destiny was hanging in the balance. He could confess his sin and throw himself on the mercy of his Lord, find restoration and eternal life or he could allow hatred to well up in him - hatred that Jesus knew him and his intentions through and through yet had given no hint of it; had allowed him to proceed without intervention or warning. He chose the latter and in that choice Satan, who had been tempting him and influencing him from outside, found his entry and took up residence within him.

But it was not only the destiny of Judas that hung in the balance; so did that of Jesus and, as consequence, of us. Jesus could have told the other disciples what Judas had done and, while they dealt with him, made his escape. Many times Jesus could have avoided the cross but long ago he had 'set his face towards Jerusalem' and his heart to obey the will of his Father. So he was in total control of his destiny. He says to Judas, "What you are engaged in doing, do even more quickly." No doubt Judas was keen to get out of the room. Having been unmasked it would have been unbearable to remain.

It is not surprising that John took no action even though Jesus had exposed Judas. Jesus was so obviously in charge that it would not occur to him to intervene. In any case, it had all happened so quickly that he had had no time to assimilate the shocking information. What is more, although Jesus had told all of them that one of them would betray him, that could well lie in the future, he had given no indication that it was imminent. Apparently the final command to Judas had been uttered loudly enough for the other disciples to hear but they did not understand its import. Judas was the treasurer of the little group and they assumed that Jesus had given him some instruction related to this role. It was only later, when the disciples were discussing what had happened that night, that they would have discovered each other's thoughts.

30. Having described the order of events, John relates it all to its spiritual context. Judas had left immediately and, as the door opened and shut to let him through, John saw and vividly recalls how dark it was outside. Judas had turned his back on the Light of the World and went into a darkness far more intense and terrible than the night.

#### The Last Supper

John does not refer to this. It is difficult, therefore, to know at what stage the institution of the Holy Communion took place. The synoptics do not mention when Judas left so was he there to receive the bread and the wine? Matthew and Mark

record that at the meal Jesus told them that one of them would betray him, and then go on to describe the institution. Assuming it would be difficult for Judas to remain once Jesus had revealed that he knew of his duplicity, they imply that Judas was not present. Luke, on the other hand, describes the institution and then records the words of Jesus about the hand of the one who will betray him being with him on the table; from which we would assume that Judas was still there.

31-32. By sending Judas on his way, Jesus had signed his own death warrant. He had deliberately set in motion the events which must inevitably end in the cross. So Jesus speaks as though plan of God for the redemption of the world had already been accomplished. "The Son of Man was, or has been, glorified." In John's gospel Jesus refers to the cross not as being crucified but as being glorified. (For a fuller explanation cf. 17:22-23). Even in the world there is a recognition that 'glory' is linked to sacrifice. A person who dies in rescuing another is afforded greater glory than one who does not. Jesus lived the whole of his life for others but now he enters upon the supreme sacrifice. This is not only his own glory, his obedience brings glory to the Father also because it is the Father's plan he is following. There is also the Father's own glory because he, too, is making a sacrifice - that of his dearly loved Son. He must have suffered as he allowed his Son to suffer.

Just as love flows back and forth within the Godhead, so it is with the glory this self-sacrificing love creates. The Father will reveal the glory of Jesus by drawing him to himself. The glory was already there in the cross, recognised by heaven but unseen by the world. It is the resurrection and the ascension which will reveal the glory to those on earth with eyes to see, and the crown will further it in heaven.

Jesus is so conscious that the process has already started - "Now the Son of Man...." His glorification will follow immediately.

33. The disciples would not have understood what Jesus meant, so he explains that he has only a short time left with them. He had already told his Jewish questioners that he would not be here long and they would not be able to find him (7:33-34). Now he tells his closest friends almost the same, but it is not that they will not find him (because, through the Holy Spirit they would indeed find him) but they could not come with him (although, unlike the unbelieving Jews, they would follow later [36]). (cf. note on v.36)

Once again, the dramatist in John sets the scene, with Jesus aware that these are the last few minutes he will have with his own, while they do not appreciate that. Upon these eleven the salvation of the world, which Jesus will accomplish, depends. For three years they have been with him; he has taught them by word and by example. What should he say to them now in these few last minutes together?

34-35. There is no time for detailed instructions or further teaching and so Jesus does not speak of doctrine but he concentrates their minds on principle - the underlying principle of creation, indeed of God himself; he speaks of love, for God is love. In these two verses he uses the word 'love' four times. If they (and we) truly loved each other, everything else would fall into place. We might not get everything right first time, but it would not be long before we did. Tolerance and forgiveness would create the space for correction of error and allow the Spirit to lead into all truth (16:13). In a world where there is division and each is out for him or herself, such love would be remarkable. Of course, individuals may sacrifice themselves for someone they deeply love (Rom. 5:7), but for a whole community to love like that would be a demonstration of something (or someone) beyond themselves. It is to live as Jesus lived. It is in this sense that it is a new commandment. The law laid down that we should love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). But that was understood as a form of an external regulation, as is demonstrated by the lawyer asking Jesus "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29) i.e. where does my obligation end? Here the command is to love as Jesus had loved them. We are to show love to all with whom we come into contact, but there is a to be a deeper bond of love between believers. (See note on 14:21.)

36. Jesus wanted his final words with his disciples to be about love and, indeed, he will return to this on two further occasions before this discourse ends. However, the words which Peter has picked up are Jesus' reference to going away. With this on his mind he asks, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus reiterates what he has just told them - they cannot at that time follow where he is going but they will do so later. This is not simply a

matter of timing, that his time to die is now and their time will come later. He is about to return to the Father but they could not go with him because the way to the eternal kingdom had not yet been opened to any human being. His death, resurrection and ascension would accomplish that.

37. Because neither Peter nor any other of the disciples understands what Jesus is speaking about, he asks why he cannot follow. His impetuosity is not yet under the control of the Holy Spirit and he makes the well-intentioned but rash statement that he is willing to lay down his life for Jesus. A statement that will haunt him before the night is out.

38. The burden of the cross looms larger and larger. It is not only the physical pain and the terror of separation from his Father, everyone will forsake him and Peter will even deny knowing him; and that not once but three times. By recording the reference of Jesus to the crowing of the cock, John, the dramatist, prepares us for a moment of tension later in the story (18:27).

## Chapter 14

1. The chapter break here may cause us subconsciously to assume that an entirely new subject has been opened. In fact the reasoning follows on naturally. Jesus has just told the group that one of them is going to betray him, that he is about to leave them and they cannot follow where he is going and that Peter will disown him before that very night is out. Each of those things would be enough to shake them, but he has revealed all three together. It isn't only that there is no security in their situation, apparently there is none within themselves. They dare not trust their own feelings or their own wills. There is no rock anywhere on which they might stand. It is to that maelstrom of emotion that Jesus speaks his words - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me."

For most of us who believe, even when life strikes us down with some devastating blow, we hold onto our faith and that faith brings us through in the end. But when we doubt our faith; when we are tempted to believe that it is all some giant confidence trick and that those things which we thought were eternal truth and on which we have built our life are false, then we enter a darkness of despair which is totally hopeless. Of course, like Peter, we need to experience something which will make us appreciate that we cannot keep ourselves; that we are saved not by our faith but by the one who is the object of our faith. Nevertheless, we are not robots, and if we are to be empty vessels for God to fill, we are still vessels, we exist as persons. God has given us free will to choose him; but what is the situation when we doubt whether we have chosen him or even if, again like Peter, we actually disown him? The answer is that for those terrifying moments when we do not know what we believe, we jump over our doubts; we cease from trying to analyse just what we do or do not believe and trust in God and in the one who himself believed he was abandoned when, from the cross he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) Perhaps it was from this experience that John wrote to encourage us, "Whenever our hearts condemn us... God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." (1 John 3:20).

2. This is a very difficult verse. Some of the difficulty is due to translation - how can you have mansions in a house? Perhaps the best translation, though cumbersome, is 'dwelling places'. The only other reference to 'my Father's house' comes earlier in this gospel when Jesus accuses the Jews of turning his Father's House (the Temple) into a market (2:16). The word for house is slightly different but is from the same root and has virtually the same meaning. The Temple, based as it is on the Tabernacle, is the 'type' or representation on earth of the place where God dwells, i.e. heaven. Such are the basic facts about the words, but what did Jesus mean? Is the emphasis to be placed on the second half of this verse where Jesus says that he is going there to prepare a place for them? That is to say, he is aware of their distress at his saying that he is going away from them (13:33), and now he assures them that it is only so that he can take them to be with him in heaven and then he adds his remark about the house and mansions as though to say, "there is plenty of room there for all."

Most commentators caution that too much should not be read into this statement with regard to divisions within heaven. It may be that there are such divisions but that is not the point here. Rather, Jesus is seeking to still the anxiety of his friends who are distressed by the things he has just told them. He is assuring them that there is a place for them with him in eternity and it will be just the right place, prepared by him personally.

William Temple concentrates on one possible meaning of the word behind 'rooms' or 'mansions' as 'staging posts' - resting-places along the way. Today, we would probably speak of motels. However, W.E. Vine states categorically, "There is nothing in the word to indicate separate compartments in heaven; neither does it suggest temporary resting-places on the road." Whereas William Barclay mentions that, "In the Greek writer Pausanias, the word monai means stages upon the way." If this is the meaning, it conveys a lovely thought. When we meet with devastating experiences (see the final paragraph of the note on the previous verse) and we are spiritually reeling, we have to stop and rethink our faith. Perhaps we come to see that things we once believed are not so, and have to take on board a new understanding. The doubts that initially threw us, become the catalyst which deepens our faith and, looking back, we realise that Jesus was with us in our time of withdrawal. We are already in the kingdom and are on the journey; Jesus is with us on the way, and he will bring us home.

Whatever our doubts, wherever we fail, if only we hold firmly to him, it is his responsibility to bring us to heaven not ours; and he will do it.

3. The way that Jesus goes is through the cross; without that we would be unable to enter heaven, but surely he is speaking of more than that. The cross opens the way but is not the place. He says that he will come back. In one sense he did (and does) that in the person of the Holy Spirit (20) indwelling us. However he speaks of coming back to take us somewhere else - to the place where he is. So this must refer to the second coming. Elsewhere in Scripture there is reference to the second coming in greater detail (e.g. 1 Thes. 4:13 ff.) However, the disciples have now all died before that second coming, so in what sense will he come back for them to take them to be where he is? Have they not gone to be with him? It would be wrong to attempt to draw more detail from these words than Jesus intended to convey i.e. was he telling them that he will be there to meet them at the moment of death? Have they already entered the final state of heaven? The over-all meaning is clear. Whilst heaven is, in some sense, a 'place' the essential truth is that its reality is to be with him where he is.

4. By saying that they knew the way to the place where he was going, Jesus clearly implies that he had already told them, and so he had - on a number of occasions and in different ways. He had told them that he was the bread of life (John 6) and living water (7:37), the light of the world (8:12) and the gate of the sheepfold (10:7); above all he is the resurrection and the life (11:25). The way to the place where he is going is himself. If we are in him we shall go with him. That is a spiritual truth. However, it is not an isolated truth; we must also follow him. We must walk through this world in the way that he walked. Jesus clearly implies that there is a way they have to take even though he has said that he will come back for them. The truth, of course, is that we have to walk the way but he walks it with us.

5. Thomas, ever the realist, states clearly that they do not know the way. In a sense they did; Jesus had told them that he was going to the Father. However, that is a general statement which we unthinkingly accept on trust until we are called to follow him there. What does that mean? What do we have to do? Is there a way there without having to die or, if not, is there a special way of dying?

6. Thomas's question prompts the reply which gives both certainty and comfort. There is no mysterious route we have to discover. Our responsibility is to walk with Jesus. In parts of the east, if you ask someone for directions, instead of giving you verbal instructions he will take you there saying the words, "I am the way," i.e. "Come with me."

Jesus states that he is the way the truth and the life. It is tempting, in preparing a sermon on this text, to analyse each of these three separately and in some depth. It is doubtful, however, if such an approach will convey to others the reality of which Jesus is speaking. It is probably better to jump over the words to the reality and then see the words as an attempt to express that reality. Jesus was intensely aware of the eternal realm; he had not only come from it, he had never left it. The whole of his life was lived in the consciousness of that eternal realm because he walked continually with his Father. That eternal realm existed in him and he in it. Truth is, in essence, what is real and Jesus was living out eternal reality, so he is the truth - not simply the way to it. Similarly, as part of the Godhead, he is the source of all being from which what we call 'life' has come. But, as its source, he is more than this life he is 'eternal life'. Again, he is not simply the way to it, he is it.

No one other than Jesus has bridged the gap between this life and eternal life. It is impossible, therefore, to enter that eternal life and come to the Father in any way other than by or through him. This raises the question, what will happen to those who earnestly seek God through other faiths? Whatever our speculations, there are only two things that we can say with certainty. If we, with our limited compassion and love, are concerned about their fate, we can be sure that God is concerned even more and Scripture states, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Secondly, if any of those from other faiths are to be saved then it will be through Jesus alone. Whether, because of their genuine and righteous search, faith in Jesus will be granted them, we cannot know. That is not to imply that there may be a second chance after death; rather

that, after death, Jesus will meet them to say, "I am the one you have been searching for and serving." But that is speculation and we have no brief to preach it. Our commission is to proclaim Jesus alone as the Saviour of all.

7. It is often said of a person, "You do remind me of your father; you are so like him." In the case of Jesus, however, it is more than that. Jesus is not simply like his Father; when we look at him we are looking at the Father. Yet we must be careful not to say that Jesus is the Father, because Jesus is a distinct personality; he has his own feelings and his own will. The truth of the matter, which will be revealed over the next four verses, will explain why, if we really know Jesus, we know the Father also. But what is the significance of 'from now on'? Surely it must refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit into the disciples. He would bring within them an experience of the Father which they should have recognised knowing Jesus. It is probably best to say no more now, but to return to this verse in the light of the comments that Jesus is about to make.

8. Philip expresses a desire fundamental to all of us. If there is a God, what is he like? Jesus has just said that the disciples have seen the Father. Philip doesn't understand; he doesn't think he has seen the Father, so he asks Jesus to show him to them.

9-10. I believe that we need to read the words of verse 9 with a sense of total astonishment on the part of Jesus. Philip's request reveals that he has not understood the basis of the whole ministry of Jesus. Having lived with the disciples for three years and encouraged them to participate in it, Jesus believed that it was now safe for him to leave them because they would carry on the work. It must have been devastating for him to realise that they had totally misunderstood how his ministry had been accomplished. Everything depended upon these eleven men and now there was no time to retrain them; Judas was already collecting the guard to arrest him. How can Philip possibly ask, "Show us the Father"? Does he not realise that Jesus has not been doing these great works himself; rather it is that he is so utterly open to the Father that it is the Father doing the works through him? Philip has been watching the Father at work but, obviously, has not realised that.

The truth involved here is vital for the spread of the kingdom. If Jesus has worked his mighty works through his own intrinsic power, then it has been a wonderful three years while he was on earth, but once he returns to heaven then it all stops and everything is as it was before he came. Oh, he has made a new life available to us but without the power to live it. However, if his becoming truly and fully man involved his surrendering his divine power (not his deity, he could never cease to be who he is in essence; he never ceased to be God, but part of his 'emptying of himself' was to surrender his personal power while he was on earth), then he was an empty vessel relying on the Father to fill him with his power. This is what the writer to the Hebrews was seeking to explain when he wrote; "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me...' Then I said, 'Here I am... I have come to do your will, O God.'" [Heb 10:5-7]

11. If you put a sponge in a bath of water is the water in the sponge or the sponge in the water? Jesus explains that he is so united to the Father that, even though he has surrendered his personal power during his earthly ministry, the Father's power is working through him. The miracles are the evidence of that.

12. This is the vital corollary to what Jesus has just explained. It is because the power for ministry is not intrinsic to himself but is the power of the Father working through the Holy Spirit in him, that the work will go on. What the Father has been doing through him, he will go on doing through the disciples if only they will open themselves totally to do the will of the Father, as he has done. For then the Holy Spirit will fill them and work the same works through them as he has worked through Jesus. There can be no doubt that this is what is in his mind because he explains that this will happen because he is going to the Father. His purpose in going to the Father is to ask him to send the Holy Spirit on the disciples (16); indeed, unless he goes, the Holy Spirit will not come (16:7).

13. The Father is in the Son through the filling of the Holy Spirit. In future, when the Son returns to the eternal realm of heaven, he will join the Father in taking up his dwelling within believers (23) by the filling of

the same Holy Spirit. Here Jesus looks forward to his imminent exaltation to heaven and says that he will play his part by doing whatever his disciples ask in his name (i.e. in line with his nature and will). The Son's will is ever to do the will of the Father and it is this which will bring glory to the Father.

14-15. Just as the Father honoured the Son by doing whatever he asked in his, the Father's, name, so from now on he, the Son, will do whatever the disciples ask in his name. To do something in the name of another is to act as his representative and so we may not step outside what we know to be his will and purpose. We will be following his will and purpose if we do as he commands and the motive for doing this is not obedience, although that is involved and must carry us along if all else seems to be absent; the ultimate motive must be our love for Jesus, that we desire to please him. That is to say, it is based on relationship. You can obey someone without having a relationship with him, but faith cannot exist without relationship.

16. In asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit, Jesus is only following the Father's prior intention. It was always part of his plan that mankind should be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. But this is the secret of all intercession, we ask only those things which the Father already intends. He has given us the privilege of co-operating with him in bringing in his kingdom. The difficulty of translating into English the Greek word, *parakletos*, is well known. It means literally someone who is called in; called in to help. (The term is used of Jesus himself in 1 John 2:1) Here it refers to one who makes the weak strong, the frightened brave, the wavering determined and guide the uncertain. To ask whether he is the Spirit of the Father or the Spirit of the Son simply confuses the matter. We can say only that, as with each member of the Trinity, he has a separate identity yet is part of that which is the one Godhead. His task and delight is to glorify the Son (16:14). In some way he brings the Son (and the Father) within those who belong to him, and so it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the indwelling Holy Spirit and Christ in us - the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

17. He is the Spirit of truth, because truth is what is real; and what is real is that eternity from which all things come, God himself. Nothing apart from God has eternal reality, it must pass away because it has no source of endurance. The world, that is human society organised apart from God, can no more receive the Spirit than a tape recorder can receive a radio programme; it does not have within it what is needed to do so. That which is born of the flesh is only flesh; only that which is born again of the Spirit is spirit (3:6).

The second part of this verse is difficult to interpret and it would be unwise to be too dogmatic especially as the phrase "and will be in you" could well be "and is in you". However, it may be that Jesus has the following situation in mind. The disciples were already moving in the realm of the Spirit to some extent. They had been born again of the Spirit, but had not yet been filled by him. How was it then, that they were able to perform the miracles they had when Jesus sent them out two by two and returned to report that people had been healed and that demons had been cast out? (Luke 9:1-10 and 10:1-17) It seems that was an extension of the earthly ministry of Jesus. To put it crudely, it is like a water pipe which runs across or through some property to reach another area; the Spirit was not yet a spring bubbling up within them (4:14). So they were aware of the Holy Spirit and recognised his presence for they had become spiritual people; but shortly, on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit would take up residence within their own spirit. There is no justification for reading into this verse the different rites of baptism and confirmation practised in some denominations.

18. Jesus passes easily from speaking of the Spirit indwelling the disciples to his own coming within them (see note on v.16 above). As the conversation has progressed, the disciples have become apprehensive. They may not fully understand what Jesus is speaking about but they must have grasped that he is leaving them. So he assures them that they will not be bereft. He is leaving, only to return immediately but in a different relationship. The context precludes any possibility that here Jesus is speaking of his second coming. It is a poor analogy but it may open our minds to understand something of the process to think of a house being connected to the electricity supply. When the power is there, it is possible to receive television programmes. The electricity is not the programme but it is the means by which the programme can enter the home, as well as supplying power for other purposes also.

19-20. Until now everyone around Jesus has seen him, just as they would see any other person. Following his death, resurrection and ascension, however, he would be 'seen' only by the eye of faith. The original disciples and various other believers did actually have a visual experience of him following his resurrection, and others all down the years have seen him when they were 'in the Spirit'; but the world, not having the Spirit (17), is unaware of his presence.

But it is deeper than just being aware of his presence. Faith is so much more than believing the right truths; it is effective, it does something, something happens. The Spirit of Jesus, indwells us and, because Jesus is life, that life is imparted to us also. Jesus has a concept of the eternal which the minds of the disciples (and our minds) find it difficult to grasp. The eternal realm is based upon, in fact it is, relationship because its foundation is God himself who is three persons in perfect relationship. So the purpose of creation is to bring all things into relationship. Jesus explains this by saying that he is in the Father, believers are in him and he is in them, it is in this sense of his indwelling that we 'see' him. In v.23 he extends this to show that the Father is also in them with himself. This is the concept Paul had when he wrote, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." [2 Cor 5:19] It is also what lies behind the reasoning of 1 Cor. 15 vv. 22-28 which ends with the glorious statement, "that God may be all in all."

Jesus says that the disciples will realise the truth of this 'on that day'. What day was that? It is probably best not to take the statement too literally and tie it only to, say, the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit, who was to lead them into all truth (16:13), would be poured out. It refers more to a growing realisation of the truth which would begin from the time of the resurrection, through the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit and then the working of that Spirit throughout the lives of believers, as he leads us on and on to greater understanding.

21. By using the translation 'command' and 'commandment' we stress a legality which John does not intend. Perhaps the word 'precepts' conveys more closely what Jesus has in mind. That does not mean that we have any less responsibility for observing them, because they are instructions given by our Lord himself. But the Christian life is not a matter of legal obedience. Jesus came to teach and to demonstrate in his own life the way God has created us to live. Just as there are natural laws (which are not laws in the legal sense) such as gravity which we must observe if we are to get along on this earth, so there are spiritual truths built into creation which we must observe if we are to live the eternal life. Jesus has revealed these, especially the new precept of love (which is not, in fact, new because it is part of the eternal order). And so, knowing him and wanting to be with him and part of him (as he has just explained), the true disciple will live according to these instructions, these precepts, which Jesus has revealed. This is the corollary of v.15 - if we love Jesus we will keep his precepts; if we keep his precepts this signifies that we love him.

Is it a condition that before the Father will love us, we must love the Son? That cannot be so because the whole thrust of Scripture shows the unconditional love of God towards us. As Paul says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) However, we cannot receive or experience that love until we open ourselves to him through his Son. Also, of course, when we respond this delights him and love expands: reciprocated love grows in a way that unrequited love cannot. Jesus has just said that the world will no longer see him but that the disciples will (19). So here he reminds them that he will show himself to them, implying a deliberate intention to do so.

22. All of this teaching is so new to the disciples that one of them, the lesser known Judas, asks why Jesus plans to reveal himself to them but not to the world. This allows Jesus to expand on what he has been saying.

23-24. There is a twofold action here. God has planned for creation to work in a certain way and, of course, that is the way that Jesus taught. When we live according to that way, obviously life operates as it was intended, it promotes well-being and joy and we are blessed. However, it is not only an automatic consequence of right living. Because eternal life depends on relationship (see note on vv. 19-20) it is personal. We follow what Jesus taught because we love him, not simply because it is the best way to live; and our obedience and our love open the way for us to receive the love of God.

God created humankind as tripartite beings, body, soul and spirit. It was his intention that the Holy Spirit should dwell within our spirit. Sin caused the human spirit to wither and cease to function and so there was nowhere for the Holy Spirit to dwell. When a person is born again of the Holy Spirit, his or her spirit comes alive and, once again, there is a place for the Holy Spirit to take up residence within us (17). (For a further explanation see note on 3:6.) But, as we have already seen, because the Godhead is a unity, the Holy Spirit brings both the Father and the Son with him. Because we are reconciled to God and made new, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come personally to make their home with us; the relationship is that close and, of course, its basis is love.

Having explained two sides of the truth - those who love him will keep his precepts (15) and those who keep his precepts love him (21) - Jesus spells out the corollary; those who do not love him will not observe his teaching. He has already explained that throughout the whole of his ministry, both word and deed, it has been the Father working through him; now he reiterates that all that he has just said does not originate with himself, they also are the words of the Father.

25-26. If it is correct that we should interpret the words of v.9 as spoken in astonishment and dismay on the part of Jesus that Philip and the disciples should have so misunderstood the nature of his ministry, then his explanation - that the ministry would go on through them because the same Holy Spirit who had worked the work of the Father through him would be in them - ministers to himself as well as to them. What he will not have time to teach them because he is about to be taken from them, will be taught to them by that same Spirit. He will recall to their minds what Jesus has said over their three years with him, even though it did not fully register at the time, and enable them to understand.

27. His spirit is not in turmoil at their failure to understand now; the future is secure so he is at peace. Neither need they be in turmoil at his statement that he is to leave them. So often we assume that peace means the absence of any form of disturbance. There is a truth in that; it is the world's understanding of peace. But there is another kind of peace which does not depend on what is happening outside us, but rather on what is happening inside us. That is the peace which belongs to Jesus and which enabled him to sleep in the stern of the boat during a severe storm (Mk. 4:38) and Peter to sleep soundly in prison the night before he was due to be brought to trial (Acts 12:6).

However, these words of Jesus are not mere platitudes; they are hard won from his own experience of life. When Andrew and Philip tell Jesus of the Greeks who have asked to see him, he sees this as the sign that his ordeal on the cross is imminent and he says "Now my heart is troubled". Similarly, when he tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him John reports, "Jesus was troubled in spirit." It has been said that the truly brave man is not the one who knows no fear but one who knows it and overcomes his fear. So with Jesus; he can speak of peace, not because he does not know what it is to feel fear but because he has experienced the power of supernatural peace through trust in his Father to see him through in safety.

28. Jesus refers to his statement in vv. 2 & 3 and now adds that if they loved him they would be glad. Wording it in that way there is the implication that they should be pleased for him. He is returning to his Father's side which will be fullness of joy. However Jesus links this joy to the fact that the Father is greater than he. Yet is he not equal with God? In essence he is, he is equally God and always will be; yet within the Godhead there is a priority. For instance, within a monarchy all the members of the family are equally royalty, yet (unless and until the monarch abdicates or dies) the monarch is supreme. Paul tells the Corinthians that Jesus must reign until everything has been made subject to him, but he adds; When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. [1 Cor 15:28] For us human beings there is a desire to be first; indeed that desire had arisen that very evening amongst the disciples (Luke 22:24), but that is not the way of the Kingdom. Jesus genuinely rejoiced that the Father was greater than he and longed to return to his presence.

There is also a lesser but important truth here. When our loved ones die we, like the disciples here, think first of ourselves and our loss. That is natural and we need to grieve; it is unhealthy to deny the pain that the separation brings. However, if those loved ones are believers, then we should be glad for them, for they have gone to be with the Father and the Son. Their joy surpasses anything that they, or we, have ever known here on earth. They are more alive than they have ever been. In the midst of our grief and loneliness we must seek not to wish them back with us, now that they have tasted the wonder of their new life. Rather, as we live out the rest of our lives, we should be looking forward to joining them and all the host of heaven in that glory they are already experiencing.

However, Jesus is sharing a deeper truth still. It is not only that he is going to the Father, which will be a great joy for himself; but he is returning to the disciples. His ministry has been wonderful but it will be even more powerful and widespread. The Father is greater than he and, when he returns, he will make that power available to them through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus has in mind the thought he has just shared with them in verse 12: - believers will do even greater things than they have seen him do because he is going to the Father.

29. Jesus explains that he is telling them these things before they happen so that, when they do happen, they will believe. He had made a similar comment a little earlier that evening (13:19). He wants the disciples to know that he is master of the situation even when it seems that he is overwhelmed by it. It is all part of the divine plan and, when the crisis is over and they have time to think it all through, they will understand what had been happening and why.

30-31. Judas has been gone some while by now and Jesus is very conscious that he has hardly any time left to him with his disciples. Literally, it will be the soldiers sent by the Jewish authorities who will arrest him, but these are simply fulfilling the will of Satan. He has already referred to Satan as the prince of this world (12:31, see note). Satan is not a king he is only a prince. This world is a principality. Jesus is the king and his kingdom is the kingdom of heaven and it is his will (because it is the will of his Father) that the kingdom should embrace this earth ('Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven'). Lucifer was the angel of light who was originally made the spiritual prince of this world. He rebelled and became the adversary, the Satan. His greatest triumph would be to destroy the Son of God. He had tried to defeat him by offering to give him the world if Jesus would change his allegiance from God to himself. The temptation was real because, as its prince, the world was Satan's to give. But Jesus had resisted that temptation. Now he was to be tempted again, this time to avoid the cross; a temptation that was so intense that Jesus sweated blood. However, because Jesus remained sinless, Satan is unable to compel or control him. The reason Jesus will go to the cross is not, as it may appear, because Satan has some power over him, but because he loves the Father and that love drives him to do what the Father desires. Jesus has just told his disciples that if they love him they will keep his commands (15); he sets the example by obeying his Father's commands. The secret of kingdom life is to walk in the ways of God; the world must learn that lesson.

There is a problem over the words, "Come now; let us leave." Chapter 18 begins with the words, "When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley." If they had left at the end of chapter 14, what were they leaving now? It could be that, having told his disciples that the prince of this world was coming, Jesus rose to prepare to go to meet him, but they did not rush and as they gathered themselves together to set out, Jesus continued to teach and the whole of chapters 15-17 took place while they were still in the upper room. If that is so, it is a little strange that John, writing so long after the event, should include these words if, in fact, they did not set forth. Although it could be that he wanted to show the determination of Jesus to move forward in his Father's plan; he was in control, not Satan. Or it could be that they did leave but stopped somewhere en route (possibly in the temple precincts - see the opening of the next chapter) and, after the prayer of chapter 17, left there and went to the Garden of Gethsemane.

## Chapter 15

If the little band had, indeed, left the upper room at the word of Jesus, "Come now; let us leave", very probably they would have had to cross the temple area. On the face of the temple building itself a vine was embossed in gold. Perhaps it was looking at this which triggered the teaching of Jesus that he is the true vine.

John does not record the Last Supper. Of course that does not mean he was unaware of it, he was there and had partaken of it. As the years had gone by he must have 'done this in remembrance of me' on countless occasions. As a commandment of the Lord he would not only obey, but he would appreciate its value. However, in his careful compilation of events for his gospel, the actual institution of the Holy Communion would not add to the truths he seeks to convey. The elements of the Eucharist are bread and wine. John had already recorded in great detail the teaching of Jesus that he is the bread of life (chapter 6); here he records the Lord's teaching that he is the true vine. The Lord's supper is a focal point of a deeper truth - the constant feeding on and dwelling in him. Receiving the bread and wine is an effective means of grace only if epitomises a continuous relationship between the believer and his Lord. Recording the institution of the Supper would add nothing to that truth anymore than recording the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain (which John omits) would add to the truth he does record that 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (14:9).

1. Frequently throughout the Old Testament Israel is described as a vine. Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10; Hos. 10:1 and, most clearly of all, Isaiah 5:7 - "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel." The purpose of a vine is to produce fruit, but this Israel had failed to do. Jesus claims to be the true fruit-bearer. God intended that his plan and purpose should be accomplished through all humankind (as depicted in the opening Chapters of Genesis). When, because of our disobedience, that plan failed, God channelled it through a smaller group, the people of Israel whom he raised up for that purpose. They also failed and so finally his plan was channelled through the one man, Jesus. He epitomises the whole human race as it was intended to be. The purpose of God was narrowed to that one person but, following his resurrection, it broadens again through the apostles to the Church and from the Church to all humankind. However, Jesus is not simply a funnel through which the grace of God must pass; he is himself the source of life for fruit bearing. Nevertheless, behind him is the source of all life, the one who granted him to have life in himself, his Father. It is his Father who personally dresses or tends the vine which is in his Son. It was the Father who sent the Son, it the Father whom the Son will ask to send another comforter - the Holy Spirit.

Nowhere does Jesus speak of 'our' Father in the sense of linking himself with us in that term. He differentiates between, 'my' Father and 'your' Father. (Of course, in the family prayer he taught his disciples in response to their request that he should teach them to pray he uses, "'Our' Father, in heaven." But he is not including himself in that: rather he says, "When you pray say...") Although Jesus brings us to the Father and although we are joint heirs with him, he has a unique relationship because he is the 'only begotten' who is part of the Godhead. God can never be our Father in that sense.

2. The vine needs to be carefully tended. Some branches are not fruit-bearing and these need to be cut out if they are not to sap the strength of the total plant. Those which are fruit-bearing have to be pruned in order to produce the maximum of good fruit. In the spiritual realm there is no doubt that we grow and mature most in times of difficulty and testing. However, it is not always easy to decide whether the source of the difficulty is the devil's attack or the pruning of God, both of which can come to us while we are abiding in the vine. In addition, Jesus explains here that God actually severs those who are not producing fruit. To whom is Jesus referring when he speaks of these branches which do not produce fruit? This causes a problem because initially they are part of the vine; how did they get there and, if they really are part of it, why do they not bear fruit? Is Jesus teaching that it is possible to be a believer yet not belong to him? Part of the problem arises because we come to it as Christians; we need to remember the situation at the time Jesus was speaking. He was a Jew and came to the Jews (1:11). Traditionally, as we have seen, the vine was a picture of the people of Israel and, in the thinking of that time, every Jew was part of the vine. God's complaint was that his people had failed him. "What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?" [Isa. 5:4] Thus the background to this teaching is that the Jews who were not producing fruit would

be cut out of the vine. We must bear that in mind as we seek to apply it to believers today. However, Judas Iscariot is an example of someone who initially responded to the invitation of Jesus to join him; he was in the vine and had the same potential as the other disciples to become a fruit-bearer. But he did not allow the word of the Lord truly to soak into him (see v.3 below); he had his own agenda instead of the Lord's. The overriding truth is clear - Jesus is looking for his people to produce fruit.

What is the fruit for which he is looking? Our immediate response may be to assume he is speaking of more converts, that is to say he is thinking of evangelism. That may be included, but it is not the primary thought which goes far deeper than that. The intention is that we should be like Jesus in every way. Paul says that the fruit (note: fruit in the singular; unlike the gifts, we are all to exhibit all the attributes of the fruit) of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. So the first fruit that the Father is looking for is within ourselves; are we changing, becoming more Christ-like? Only then does the power of the Spirit work through us and out to others and to the world, which should be an inevitable consequence of the change in us.

3. Jesus had already referred to the fact that the disciples, with the exception of Judas, were already clean (13:10) but he had not then explained why. Now he tells them it is because of the word which he has spoken to them. A word is the means by which we express ourselves, so the word Jesus had spoken to the disciples was the personal expression of God (see 1:1). They had responded to that word and so they had passed from death to life (5:24). Paul refers to the washing of the word (Eph. 5:26) and in 17:17 Jesus is to speak of sanctification by the word which is truth. The word, the expression of God, reveals the reality of the kingdom and those who see it and enter it are made clean.

4. By responding to the life which Jesus offers us, he enters us and we enter him (14:20). Thus we are set within the vine; it is the Father's doing. However, Jesus will not override our freewill; he allows us the freedom to walk away. Our freewill is the only thing we have to offer him and when we do that it delights him - yes, we, his creatures, can actually give pleasure to our Creator. Provided we remain in him then his life is in us and will work his will, first in us and then through us out to the world. The man or woman who is not abiding in Jesus may be generous and may do many good things but those things cannot convey the life of God, the life which upholds all things (Heb.1:3), because this has to do with the spiritual realm and that life can come through no other route.

5. We would expect Jesus to describe the situation by saying that we are the branches set in himself who is the main stem; but he describes himself as the whole vine, implying both stem and branches. This picture may cause complications if pressed too far (what about the branches which are cut off?) but it conveys the wonderful truth of the unity between the Lord and ourselves similar to Paul's description of believers together being the body of Christ. The 'life-force' of God is in the whole of the vine, not just its stem, provided the branch remains attached, but the moment it is cut off that life-force no longer flows.

This allegory of the vine illustrates so clearly why we do not live under the law but in grace. The law has nothing to do with the life of God; if obeyed it simply controls behaviour. The power which brought creation into being, which raised Jesus from the dead and took him into heaven and which, Paul says, is in or for us (Eph.1:19) cannot be received by keeping a law but only by a contact with its source so immediate and intimate that it can be described only as abiding or dwelling in Jesus so that his life flows through us. Whatever else we do or are has no eternal value because its source is not the Holy Spirit. "Apart from me you can do nothing!"

6. Jesus hammers home this point. Apart from him there is no purpose, no plan and no power; nor is there any place for such a person in eternity - how can there be if eternal life is not flowing through him or her? Separated from the vine a branch must wither. The wood of the vine is useless for any purpose other than producing fruit. William Temple points out that there is a change of tense here which cannot easily be reproduced in English. "If a man abide not in me, he was cast outside..." The moment of severance, is the moment of death, the withering has already begun.

7. This verse is similar to 14:13-14. We tend to come at such statements from below - whatever we ask we will get. Jesus sees it from above; if we are truly abiding in him, then the plan, purpose and life of God will be flowing through us (the plan and purpose are virtually synonymous with the life of God because they are all what it means to say God is always expressing himself). If God is expressing himself through us - and he refers to his words because they are self-expression - and we are perfectly in line with that expression (i.e. abiding in him) then what we pray will be what we desire and that will be in accordance with his will, and so we are bound to receive what we ask.

8. Jesus says that this brings glory to God. At the root of glory is self-sacrifice, self-giving love (see note on 1:14). The whole of this teaching about the vine is that we can do nothing if we are separated from Jesus. We must give up living for ourselves, setting ourselves at the centre of our lives, and live for him just as he lived for his Father. This sacrifice of our own wills produces glory to the Father because it is through this way of living that others may see God. The fruit demonstrates the ways of God and reveals that we are disciples of Jesus.

9-10. The source of self-sacrifice is love; we are willing to give up ourselves for the love of another, just as Jesus gave up himself for love of us. The life which flows through us if we abide in him is love, for God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). To remain in Jesus is to remain in his love. So many believers do not appreciate how much God loves us: of course, none of us can fully comprehend it but some see him as a sort of policeman waiting to pounce at the slightest wrong; they believe that they can never please him and that they are a constant source of disappointment to him. Perhaps their human parents created that impression and they cannot believe that God is any different. God is our loving Father and he delights in us. When we stop living for ourselves, follow Jesus and live for him, that love both enfolds us and flows into and through us. Whatever we understand about Adam and Eve, we see them in their state of innocence walking naturally in the love of God. This state was destroyed by their disobedience; it is maintained, therefore by obedience. It is not so much obedience to various laws, but rather following the precepts of Jesus which he not only taught but lived out, for they are the precepts of the Father, and as such they are the precepts which order life. He has already said, "If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching" (14:23). This is the corollary; to obey the teaching is to remain in his love.

11. Obviously it is important that God's will is done, and that it is done through us: from the opening chapters of Genesis we see that man was instructed by God to do certain tasks - to fill the earth and subdue it, having dominion over the rest of creation (1:28) which involved working the earth and taking care of it (2:15). Jesus has revealed to his disciples how that is to be accomplished; not by following a law but by a communion with the Father so close that the power of God might flow through them into the world. That communion is made and maintained only by our abiding or remaining in him, in Jesus. But we are not channels only, we are human beings with intellect, emotion and will. We can participate. So Jesus says that he has revealed the truth of how creation is designed to work so that they (we) may experience joy. This is deeper than happiness because it does not depend on our circumstance, it depends on him; it is his joy. It springs from a deep peace and satisfaction that comes from being in line with creation's plan because we are at one with the Creator (cf. 16:24)

12-14. Jesus develops his teaching by referring again to his 'new' precept, which is 'old' because it is the main spring not only of creation's plan but of creation itself, love. In the words of an old song, "It's love makes the world go round". So love, love of God, who is love, and of our fellows is the driving force and the secret of all creation. The love which Jesus has shown his disciples is self-sacrificial: not only in his death but in the whole of his life, given up to the welfare and salvation of others. His death is the culmination and extent of a life lived out for others. That is the love to which we are called. No one can give greater love than to lay down his or her life for another. Again, that does not mean only to be killed, it is a daily walk of putting others before yourself. It is to die to self. Jesus speaks of a person laying down his life for his friends. Paul points out that it was while we were his enemies and sinners that Christ died for us (Rom. 5: 8 & 10) but at the moment that Jesus was speaking these words the only ones with him were the eleven disciples and it is natural that he should see them as the epitome of all who would believe in him through them (17:20). He is not here speaking of the world (see 17:9) but of those who are abiding in the vine, in himself. It is the love that believers show towards

each other that is to reveal Jesus to the world (13:35, 17:23). He was about to lay down his own life for them, his friends. He had chosen them to be his friends as he is about to tell them (16 & 19) but they had a responsibility to remain his friends which they would do if they obeyed his precepts, as he has just reminded them (10). In this passage there is a balance between the prior election of God in that he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and our responsibility to remain or abide in him. We do that by following his precepts. It was mankind's unwillingness to follow God's precepts, mankind's disobedience, that cut us off from God originally; not to follow Christ's precepts similarly cuts us off from him.

15. There is a profound truth in this verse. The Jews lived by the law. God raised up for them leaders anointed with the Holy Spirit to whom he revealed particular plans but this revelation was limited and the people themselves simply had to obey commands. The disciples, and now we who believe because of them, have been drawn into close fellowship with the Godhead. Everything that Jesus has learned from the Father he has shared with those who love him. He has already told them that the Holy Spirit will teach them all things (14: 26) and he is about to tell them that the Spirit will guide them into all truth. We are not treated as those who have to follow in blind obedience, we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16); we could not possibly absorb or even receive all that God is or purposes, but all that we need to know is available to us. In his earthly ministry, with his human mind, Jesus did not know all, only what the Father made known to him and that he had shared with the disciples. Similarly, now, the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God and makes known to us all that we need to understand (1 Cor. 2:7-16). It is astonishing that we are friends of Jesus, friends of the Creator of all.

16. As already mentioned there is a link here to the doctrine of predestination (see note on vv. 12-14). However, the immediate reference is to the choice by Jesus of the eleven and he sets that choice within the context of his teaching here about the vine producing fruit. Whatever our views about the undoubted conflict within our human minds in seeking to reconcile the doctrines of election and free will, we must bear in mind that election is not a reward for faithful service already performed, but a call to bear fruit, a call to present and future service, and it is to be fruit that will endure in eternity (see note on v.2).

Again Jesus refers to receiving whatever we ask. The whole of this part of the discourse springs from 14:12/13. If the Holy Spirit who worked the Father's work through Jesus is in us also, then we are part of the vine. That life force flows through us as through him. Our desire will be to please him (so we shall keep his precepts) and so we shall pray for those things which we know he desires and which, therefore, we also desire. As it is God's will in the first place, of course we shall receive what we ask. (See notes on 14:13/13 where Jesus promises to do whatever we ask in his name, and 15:7 where 'it' will be done and here in 16 where the Father will give whatever we ask.)

17. This discourse is all of a piece: love, obedience, answered prayer, and abiding in Jesus; take one away and the whole structure falls. Peter's question in 13:36 interrupted what Jesus was impressing upon his little band - that they should love one another; and Philip's request that Jesus should reveal the Father was a further distraction. However, it did not divert Jesus from his theme, it simply enabled him to explain it in greater depth. Here he is instructing them again to love each other.

18-19. When William Temple wrote his Readings in St. John's Gospel in 1939 he was able to say, "We live in a country where for many generations the Gospel and the faith which it calls forth have influenced the lives and thoughts of men. It is possible that even complete loyalty to Christ would not win its hatred." Now, sixty years later at the turn of the century, I cannot write that. There is strong and vociferous attack on the Church and on any proclamation of the claims and truths of our faith. We live in what is called a post-modern age where it is claimed that there are no absolute truths. At present we are free to practise what we believe provided it does not affect the lives of those who believe something else, but there is strong objection to any attempt on the part of believers to influence the laws of the land and thus, so it is claimed, impose our views on the nation at large.

Temple was also able to write, "In our conflict with the flesh and the devil the world itself in a civilised country gives us some support." Again, that is no longer true. Pornography is allowed and only its very worst excesses are controlled to any degree, and witchcraft is no longer illegal and is actively promoted. The problem this causes for the Church is not that it is attacked but that it lowers its standard. A perceptive teacher pointed out some years ago that if the Church's standard were, say, (if such measurement were possible) ten percent higher than that of the world, then when the world's standard falls from sixty percent to forty, the Church's falls from seventy to fifty; whereas, of course, the precepts of the Lord remain constant. As Jesus explains, the world attacks the Church, when the Church is true to its Lord, because it reveals the shortcomings and the sin of the world's way.

The fact is that we were once of the world and Jesus has chosen and called us out of it (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11, especially v.11). Thieves always resent more vehemently those who were of their number but have broken free, than those who were never one of them anyway.

20. Jesus has told them already that evening that a servant is not greater than his master (13:16) but there it was to encourage them to a humility like his own. Here he is warning them to expect the same treatment that the world gave to him. If we are about the same work as himself then it will provoke the same response; there will be those who will persecute but there will also be those who believe, and it is for the sake of the latter that we must persevere and it is they who are our reward on earth, just as Jesus was revived and stimulated by his talk with the woman at the well (4:32). Of course our deeper motive must be to obey the Lord and preach the gospel to every creature, and our true reward is his "Well done, good and faithful servant."

21-25. The world's persecution and hatred of those who follow Jesus is not because of them as people but of what, or rather who, they represent. (Although, of course, as we continue to represent him we are being changed into his likeness.) To say that they do not know the one who sent him is not a direct contrast with 17:3 where eternal life is described as knowing God, because the words for 'know' are different in the original. There it refers to deep personal knowledge; here it simply means ignorance. The world just does not understand the whole concept of the spiritual realm. Jesus had come to open their eyes but they simply refused to accept the truth he was seeking to explain. This attitude has persisted through the ages and seems to be even more prevalent today. Ignorance is excusable if there is no opportunity for gaining knowledge; however, these people had been confronted with utter goodness and love. This is John's equivalent to the synoptic gospels recording the statement of Jesus that sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Matt. 12:31, Mk. 3:29, Lk. 12:10). We may have doubts about just who Jesus is and that is forgivable, but when we see what is good and call it evil then what hope of redemption can there be?

The Jews believed that they alone of all nations had been given the true revelation of God and the leaders, the lawyers and Rabbis, believed that they had a greater knowledge of him than the ordinary people. But the fact that they do not recognise that Jesus is revealing the Father, that he who has seen him has seen the Father (14:9), shows that they do not know the Father (21), and by venting their hate on Jesus they show that they hate the Father also.

In v. 22 Jesus referred to what he had spoken, his words; now he refers to his works. In the words and deeds of Jesus the Father was expressing himself (see note on 14:10). In Jesus the Jews had both heard and seen the Father at work. They had not recognised him; more, they had opposed and then hated both the Son and the Father. This tendency to hate what does not conform to our own ideas and, especially, what shows up or is a criticism of our own failure and inadequacy is ingrained and is manifest in every age. The psalmist experienced it (35:19 and 69:4) and Jesus quotes that now, "They hated me without reason."

This raises again an issue which occurs throughout this gospel - predestination and freewill. If the Jews had not hated Jesus so vehemently they would not have demanded his crucifixion but without that he could not have saved us, ("without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." [Heb 9:22]) Once again, all we can say is that the Jews were totally responsible for their attitude and behaviour, and must bear the consequences; they are guilty of sin (24). Yet the death of Jesus was in the sovereign plan of God which must inevitably be fulfilled.

26-27. Jesus has been speaking of the hatred and opposition that the simple fact of his being there, his incarnate existence, provokes. If the disciples are true to him they will provoke and experience the same hatred of the world. Nevertheless, the witness to the truth (that is, what is real) must go on; and it will go on when Jesus is taken from this world because the Holy Spirit will come. He is the same Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus at his baptism and through whom Jesus was able to work his works, or perhaps more correctly, through whom the Father was able to work his works in Jesus (14:10). So he proceeds or goes out from the Father, just as Jesus, though not 'created', was begotten of the Father. Both Jesus and the Spirit, though separate persons in their own right, are expressions or manifestations of God. So, because of their unity, although the Spirit proceeds from the Father, he will be sent by Jesus.

However, the Holy Spirit does not operate in a vacuum. Just as sound needs air if it is to be heard, so the Holy Spirit requires a person upon and within whom to work God's will on earth. So those who know Jesus already are the ones he will use. Initially, of course, it was the disciples who fulfilled this role. There is a very real sense in which they are unique; they had been with Jesus from the earliest days of his ministry. No doubt they had watched him and then he had invited them to join him. So they were eyewitnesses. But today those who know him also have experiences of him to share, and the Holy Spirit can use them just as he used the first disciples.

## Chapter 16

1. To insert a break here by making a new chapter is artificial because Jesus continues to develop his theme of the world's hatred. Most of his ministry had been conducted away from Jerusalem where the disciples had experienced the success of Jesus's popularity. They might well have expected a similar success in their own mission when they went out in the power of the Holy Spirit; in which case, when they met the opposition similar to that which Jesus experienced in Jerusalem, they might well wonder if they had got it right, was God really with them? To prevent them being diverted and stumble because of it, Jesus warns them of the extent of the opposition they will experience. (See 13:19 and 14:29.)

2-3. To the Jews faith was part of everyday life - as it should be for everyone - and fellowship involved participation in the synagogue. To be deprived of this was, therefore, social ostracism. Jesus warns his followers that they must be prepared for this; in fact more than this, they were in danger of being killed and such a murder would be done in the name of faith. The word 'service' implies worship. Those who sought to kill followers of Jesus would believe that they were stamping out heresy and thus were doing the will of God. We have only to think of the inquisition and the crusades to see how easy it is to deceive ourselves that religious fanaticism is serving the will of God. Jesus repeats, in a slightly different form, what he said in 15:2, they do not know either the Father or the Son, although this time he uses the word for 'know' which is found in 17:3 implying personal knowledge involving relationship.

4. From the synoptic gospels we learn that Jesus had warned of persecution in general but here (and particularly from John's aspect of the deeper, spiritual realm which lies behind the world as it appears) Jesus explains that the reason for the hostility is himself; these people are opposing the truth of God which he has revealed. There was no need for him to explain this before because as he was there with them the opposition was directed at him. Now that he is to be no longer with them, it will be directed at them as his representatives; more, he will in fact be in them so the persecution directed at him will be focused on them.

5-6. Jesus says that none of them asks him where he is going; yet that is the very question that Peter did ask a little earlier (13:36) and Thomas had made a comment akin to it (14:5). However, their remarks arose from a limited understanding of the situation; they would have assumed that he was talking about going to some other place on earth, another town or even nation. That is made obvious by Peter's next question, "Why can't I follow you now?" As Jesus has continued his discourse he has made it clear that he is speaking of going to the Father (14:28); he is speaking about that unseen spiritual realm which underlies the whole of John's Gospel. The disciples would have realised that he was speaking about something far deeper than they had appreciated and they would have been filled with a foreboding of dangers which they would have to face without him. It is natural enough that they would have been overwhelmed by what all this would mean for them and in their own distress none of them asked what it would mean for him.

7. Jesus assures them that his leaving them is an advantage for them and will benefit them because he will send them the Holy Spirit. Theologians make so much of just how the Holy Spirit will come. In 14:16 Jesus says he will ask the Father and the Father will give the Holy Spirit; here, as in 15:26 (see note), he says that he himself will send the Spirit. But he adds a significant statement, "Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you." Why will he not come? He had come, at least in part, upon the prophets of old and on others e.g. Samson, Gideon and David. However, it seems that this was a special dispensation in that, although these men lived before salvation was wrought in Jesus, God would not leave himself without witness and he was willing to account them as righteous - although this could be only through the eternal effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice - so that his people might have the guidance they needed. The problem is solved if we take the words of Jesus here about his going away as referring directly to his death on the cross. Unless we are cleansed, the Holy Spirit cannot take up his residence within us. When Noah sent forth the dove, it returned to him because, "the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth" [Gen. 8:9]. The earth had to be cleansed by the water and this had not yet receded. Similarly, the Holy Spirit, who came upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove, could not dwell within humankind until we had been cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

8. The word 'convict' is also translated 'convince'. It implies a careful examination with the purpose of bringing to light the truth of a situation. With regard to the truth about humankind, of course, the truth reveals our failure, our fault, our sin. With regard to Jesus it reveals his righteousness, with regard to Satan, it reveals his condemnation. These things are not understood by our natural senses and abilities, they are spiritually discerned (Cor. 1:14) and so they have to be revealed by the Holy Spirit. But note that the truth is not revealed in a vacuum, it is the truth expressed in and through Jesus which the Holy Spirit declares: the sin is not to believe in Jesus, the righteousness is because Jesus goes to the Father, and the judgement relates to Satan's attack on Jesus which failed.

9. Jesus explains the three terms he has used. The world's sin is that the truth has been revealed and the world has not recognised it (1:10). Of course, left to itself, the world does not understand this; this is the blindness of humankind - "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." [2 Cor 4:4] It is the work of the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of the world to this truth. However, we again are faced with the doctrine of election versus free will, because not everyone is convinced of this truth. It is the sovereign choice of God; as Paul explains, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." [2 Cor 4:6]

10. The conviction of righteousness may cover a number of aspects. The world convicted Jesus of unrighteousness, that is why he was condemned to die with other criminals. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost he proclaimed that, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." [Acts 2:36] and the effect was dramatic, When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [Acts 2:37] The Holy Spirit convicted them of their error of judgement about what righteousness was. However, it is deeper than that. Jesus proclaimed that his whole life was lived to please the Father. Many doubted that his was the way God desires man to live. It was the fact that Jesus went not to the grave but to the Father, that proved that Jesus had been right. The Father would not accept a charlatan and sinner but the resurrection and ascension proved that the Father had accepted him. It may be argued that it was only believers who accepted the truth of the resurrection and ascension, so this provided no proof to the world. However, it can be argued on the other side that if a ringleader gathers a gang around him, when that leader dies his group dissipates fairly quickly and the movement fails. In this case, however, although Jesus was seen physically no longer, the movement (the Church) not only continued, it grew in strength. This is the very argument Gamaliel used to the Sanhedrin, "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." [Acts 5:38-9] It did not fail; it, and therefore Jesus, was from God.

11. The underlying theme of the whole of John's gospel is that there is an unseen spiritual realm running parallel to this material world in which we live and, however it may appear at present, that is the eternal reality and it is this world which is ephemeral. Jesus was intensely aware of that spiritual realm because, during his earthly ministry, he lived in both that and the world. We see something of the depth of his awareness in the record of his temptation in the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane; it was a battle to the death - literally. It was Jesus who won. The devil did all he could to destroy Jesus, but by his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus defeated him and he stands condemned. This is the sign that all opposition to God is doomed and will be overcome. However, we are not so intensely aware of this spiritual realm and do not perceive that Satan was defeated; which is why we need to be born again of the Holy Spirit to bring to life our own spirit (cf. note on 3:6); and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what happened in the spiritual realm at that pivotal point in eternal history.

For an explanation of the term 'prince of this world' see note on 12:31.

With all this, however, we are faced with the problem that although Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict or convince the world of these things, only very few who are in the world are convicted or convinced. But Jesus has already stated that the world cannot accept the Spirit because it neither sees him nor knows him (14:17). (See note on v.9)

12. Although the disciples realised that Jesus was someone special and even that he was “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” (Matt. 16:16) they could not possibly, at that time, appreciate the full implications of that. There was so much more they had to take in, which had to become part of them, before they could understand other things they needed to know. Jesus knew that they could not assimilate any more of the truth at that time, especially in the state of tension which had been created by the events of that evening.

13. Jesus has already spoken of the Spirit as that of truth (14:17 q.v.), here he states that he, the Spirit and therefore a person and not just a vague influence, will lead them into all truth. Here there is a problem. Not every discovery of truth is made by a believer. Some of the great discoveries in the sciences, which is surely a part of the total truth or reality, have been made by pagans, agnostics and atheists. What is more, some of those who have made these discoveries have explained that the solutions to problems they faced have been ‘given’ to them. They had exhausted all their own efforts and had given up thinking about them; they have gone out for a breath of fresh air and, looking up at the night sky, the solution has suddenly popped into their mind; or they have gone to bed and woken in the night with the answer. It is easy to explain this as the working of the subconscious mind when the pressure of conscious effort is removed. However, the process is so similar to one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit reveals truths to believers. It is often when our feverishly busy minds are ‘still’ that our spirit is able to insert into it the truths revealed by the Holy Spirit. As one evangelist, John Wimber, has put it, we ‘know in our knower’. There would be no problem about crediting such revelation to non believers as the work of the Holy Spirit were it not that Jesus stated that “The world cannot accept (or receive) him.”

There are a number of explanations that may be offered. First, that although the similarity of working may be apparent it is not genuine. The discoveries made by non-believers are not the work of the Holy Spirit but it is indeed the subconscious mind providing the solution when the pressure in the conscious mind is released. Secondly, God in his sovereignty will use non-believers to fulfil his plans (e.g. he calls the pagan king Cyrus his ‘anointed’ [lit. ‘Messiah’] Is. 45:1). Therefore, on the occasions under discussion, the non-believers are directed by the Holy Spirit who does not, however, take up residence within them; they do not ‘receive’ him and may even deny he exists. Thirdly, and this is related to the second explanation, when Jesus speaks of ‘all’ truth, he is referring to the eternal spiritual reality whereas the truths of science are to do with this material dimension which is destined for destruction. The Holy Spirit may well reveal the latter truths to non-believers if this furthers his will, but they remain totally oblivious to the overall purpose of God and their own place in it. Their discoveries have no effect on their own eternal destiny because they have not been born again of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever explanation we adopt with regard to the discoveries of non-believers, the Holy Spirit is given to believers to guide us into all truth. Paul details gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12) some of which are to do with revelation - words of knowledge, of prophecy and of wisdom - and these are to be valued. However, Paul also speaks of us having the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). We are not to be simply recipients of messages like some human fax machine; we are to mature in our understanding, guided by the Holy Spirit, so that our thoughts reflect those of Jesus.

Just as Jesus did not speak on his own but it was the Father in him doing his work (14:10), so the Holy Spirit, although a distinct person, does not speak on his own; but nor does he act only as a courier conveying the words of the Father alone. He draws from the well of knowledge and purpose of the united Trinity.

14-15. This thought of the individuality of each member of the Godhead yet their total unity is continued. The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, who had come to bring glory to the Father (14:13) who gave glory to the Son (17:24). So the Holy Spirit will reveal what belongs to the Son, but that which belongs to the Son is everything that the Father has.

The thought behind this verse is similar to something Paul says:- However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" - but God has revealed it to us by his

Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. [1 Cor 2:9-10] God is continually expressing himself and that expression embraces everything that is. To help illustrate this, picture the air waves: messages are flowing from radio transmitters with the various programmes both audio and television; in addition there are the radio links of the emergency services, commercial taxis and mobile phones. We could not cope were we to receive all this information at once; indeed, only a minute amount of it relates to any one individual. We need a system which divides all this information onto specific wave lengths to enable us to receive only what is addressed to us. So, says St. Paul, the Holy Spirit searches all that God is continually expressing and reveals to us that which we need, whether it be as nations, communities, churches or individuals. Jesus is explaining something similar when he says that the Holy Spirit will take from what is his (which is all that the Father has) and make it known to the disciples.

16. The meaning of this verse is closely linked to 14:19 q.v.. It refers to much more than his appearances between the Resurrection and Ascension. Both verses arise in the context of teaching about the Holy Spirit. The N.I.V. obscures the meaning by translating two different words as 'see'. The first is the one used in 8:51 where Jesus says that the person who keeps his word will not particularly notice death. The disciples had spent the best part of three years observing Jesus as he worked on earth; that situation was about to change and they would be on their own. Yet they would discover that they were not on their own, the Holy Spirit would be with them, taking from what belonged to Jesus and making it known to them (15). But they were unable to comprehend this sort of 'seeing' until they experienced it. It was a part of the truth that was more than they could now bear (12). This verse is an integral part of the section of teaching which began at v.5.

17-18. By referring to 'some' of the disciples verbalising their confusion, is John implying that others, perhaps including himself, preferred to be quiet, trying to wrestle out the meaning of Jesus's words? It seems that the great problem was the 'little while'. Even if they were reluctant to accept what Jesus had been saying more and more insistently that he would be taken from them, at least they could understand the meaning. They had seen the hostility of the Jews, and Thomas had even expressed the thought, "Let us also go that we may die with him" (11:16). Presumably they would interpret 'going to the Father' as referring to his death; how then after another 'little while' would they see him again? No doubt, like Martha (11:24) they believed in a future resurrection of everyone at the last day, so they would see Jesus again then but if his leaving them was going to happen in a little while - imminently, as he seemed to be telling them - how long was the second 'little while'?

19. Although the disciples were murmuring their confusion amongst themselves, they did not express their questions to Jesus directly. However, as so often, he was sensitive to what was going on and pinpoints the heart of their problem by repeating the phrase 'a little while'.

20. He therefore turns from explaining the events to come, to how they will feel about these events. In this he exhibits his profound understanding of human beings. What affects and motivates us is not so much events as how we perceive those events. A child in a loving family who believes himself to be unloved will be as unhappy as a child who is truly unloved. So he warns them that they will suffer grief (of bereavement) while the world, which has for so long opposed him, rejoices because he and his influence has been removed. However, the grief will not last long, it will be turned to rejoicing.

It is important to appreciate that Jesus is not teaching that the cross would be seen to be a mistake which causes grief, but it would be corrected by the resurrection which would bring joy. That might be how the situation could be interpreted from a worldly perspective. Jesus is thinking of the true spiritual meaning. The Cross, Resurrection and Ascension are all one. Even the Cross is his glorification. That does not lessen its pain, physical, emotional and spiritual, (and no wonder Jesus shrank from it) but it is all within God's purpose for the redemption of the world; the Cross will be part of what will cause the disciples, and all believers, to rejoice.

21. The illustration is apposite because Jesus was winning the redemption which would pave the way for the Holy Spirit to come and bring about the new birth in the hearts of believers.

22. The disciples were confused and soon, when Jesus is arrested, they would be frightened and dismayed. Following his death they would grieve. However, after three days, Jesus would rise from the dead and see them again. The Resurrection would bring immediate joy because they would see him again, but it is much more far reaching than that because the consequence of the Resurrection - the Ascension and coming of the Spirit - would be a source of rejoicing throughout the rest of their lives and, indeed, for eternity. They would experience persecution but nothing and no one could take from them the presence of the Holy Spirit and the certainty of the future with God in eternity.

23-24. There are two different words used in the original behind the word translated 'ask'; aiteo and erotao.

23. In that day you will no longer ask (erotao) me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask (aiteo) in my name. Until now you have not asked (aiteo) for anything in my name. 24. Ask (aiteo) and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.... 26. In that day you will ask (aiteo) in my name. I am not saying that I will ask (erotao) the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

W. E. Vine (Expository Dictionary) states, "Aiteo more frequently suggests the attitude of a suppliant, the petition of one who is lesser in position than he to whom the petition is made... erotao - that the petitioner is on a footing of equality or familiarity with the person whom he requests... In this respect it is significant that the Lord Jesus never used aiteo in the matter of making request to the Father." Vine quotes Trench: "as often as he asks, or declares that he will ask anything of the Father, it is always erotao, an asking, that is, upon equal terms... Martha on the contrary, plainly reveals her poor, unworthy conception of his person, that... she ascribes that aiteo to him which he never ascribes to himself, John 11:22."

The NIV differentiates in v. 23 by adding the word 'anything' to the first clause, implying correctly (because erotao is the word used in v.19), 'you will not question me', no doubt because when the Holy Spirit comes he will guide them into all truth (13).

It is not only that whatever they ask in the name of Jesus the Father will give them, but also, whatever they ask the Father he will give them in the name of Jesus (see 14:26). That is to say, Jesus is a true intermediary; whatever we ask must be in line with his purpose, will and character, it has to pass through him; but the answer to our petitions does not by-pass him, it is because of the Son and our relationship with him that the Father grants them and blesses us through him. Jesus is both God and man, it is through him that we are linked to the Father.

When our mind is completely identified with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) we shall be asking only those things which it is first the will of the Father that we should have: how then can it be other than that we shall receive what we ask? and what joy it brings to see the answer to our prayers. Indeed there can be no greater joy than to experience the realisation that God has used us, we are caught up in the purposes of God (cf. 15:11).

25. So much of what Jesus has taught the disciples has been in the form of parables or statements which, though in understandable words, hold a greater meaning than is immediately obvious e.g. "I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd." If the disciples understood something of what Jesus was seeking to explain, they would appreciate also that he was talking of something far deeper which eluded them. Indeed, this is why Jesus spoke in this way; spiritual truths cannot be grasped by those who are not themselves spiritual (1 Cor. 2:14). The disciples were learning but the Spirit had not yet been given. So Jesus does not (because it is impossible to do so) use words which would describe Kingdom life in literal terms; he uses phrases which obviously cannot be taken literally e.g. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me... streams of living water will flow from within him." (7:38) These words are intriguing, any serious minded person will sense that they carry an important meaning, yet that meaning cannot be fully appropriated as they stand.

Jesus acknowledges that he has been talking 'in riddles' but tells them that a time is coming when he will do so no longer; he will speak plainly. He can be thinking only of the coming of the Holy Spirit and these verses parallel 12-15. The unity of the Godhead is such that terms are interchangeable. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7, Phil. 1:9) and the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:11, Phil. 3:3). The Holy Spirit will guide them but will not speak on his own, he will take from what belongs to Jesus (13/14) and so it will be Jesus who speaks to them (25). The content of his speaking will be the Father.

26. That day (i.e. following the coming of the Spirit) the disciples will not need Jesus to speak on their behalf, his finished work of redemption means that the way is open for them to speak directly with the Father. Yes, Jesus is always interceding for us (Heb. 7:25) but this is not because we do not have access to the Father ourselves. We can so easily miss the wonder and profundity of this simple statement: because of Jesus we have personal access to that which, him who, created everything.

27. There are two great words in the New Testament which we translate as 'love'. The word which Christianity has made peculiarly its own is 'agapao' whose characteristic is that it depends not upon the object who is loved but upon the lover. That is to say, the love is not drawn from him or her by some attribute in the one who is loved but depends solely on the nature of the lover. It is self sacrificing and gives of itself; it depends on the will rather than feeling. This is the nature of God who gave himself in creation and in the redemption of that creation and who is continually expressing himself in self sacrificial love. The other word is 'phileo' which involves feeling and tenderness. It may not carry the same altruistic nobility of agapao but is more personal. The contrast between the two is revealed most clearly in 21:15-19, where both words are used in the same conversation. In this verse the word phileo is used twice. The person who responds to Jesus, believing he is the one who has come from God, and who has entered into a personal relationship with him, enters also into an intimate relationship with the Father. This is the love that exists in true family life, which promotes an ease of relationship and where the attributes of each individual are recognised, valued and enjoyed. Such is the relationship each believer has with the Father. He is the Father of all, but he has become my Father.

28. By coming to the world as man with all that that implies, and by his imminent death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus will have opened up the way for us to enter eternity and forged the link between the Father and us who believe. Because of him the Holy Spirit will come to dwell within us. His work is completed and so he can leave the world and return to the Father from whose presence and nature he came. Of course, the manner of his leaving is crucial because it is that which accomplished our redemption, but in this particular context that is not the principal thought in the mind of Jesus. He is telling the disciples that he is leaving them to return to the Father.

29-30. In v. 25 (see note) Jesus has said that the time will come when he will no longer speak to them in parables or proverbs, but will speak plainly. The disciples think that he is doing so now. Earlier (13:33) he had said that he was going away and where he was going they could not come. He said that he was going away but was coming back (14:28). He had told them that he was going to "him who sent me," but that this was good because the Counsellor would come (16:7). All this is confusing but now he has said clearly, "I am leaving the world and returning to the Father." That is a clear statement they can understand and assume that the time for riddles is over. In fact, they still have not understood. Spiritual truths have to be explained in spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:13), and until the Spirit comes they will not appreciate the true meaning of what he says. It is interesting that in the future, when they do understand so much more, they will discover that they will not be able to convey the depths of their understanding to others, who are not spiritual. This is what Paul experienced and he wrote, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly." [1 Cor 3:1-3]

A short while before, they had wanted to ask him questions but had not felt able to do so (17/18). But Jesus knew exactly what they wanted to ask and in verses 19-28 he had virtually answered their questions. They realised that he knew everything about them; he did not have to wait for them to ask questions before he knew

what they were thinking. It is so similar to the psalmist being overwhelmed by the realisation of God's knowledge of him: "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD." [Ps. 139:1-4]

It is this similar realisation of the disciples that Jesus knows them that makes them believe that he came from God. This reference to knowing all things surely must be qualified in respect of his earthly ministry. What he knew 'supernaturally' was not intrinsic to him then, it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (see 8:29 and especially 14:10/11 and note).

31-2. Jesus says to them in effect, "So you believe you believe!" He is not disparaging their faith, indeed he will shortly acknowledge it before the Father (17:8), but they need to go deeper, it has to be strengthened. Because he does indeed know all things (30) he knows that before the night is out they will all desert him. Zechariah had prophesied, "Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." (Zech. 13:7). The phrase 'each to his own home' may well mean that literally the disciples returned to wherever they were lodging while they were in Jerusalem (although Peter and John, at least, stayed on to watch what happened to Jesus). However, it may well imply more than this. Even after the resurrection the disciples were indeed like a sheep without a shepherd and Peter returned to his role as a fisherman. Without the coming of the Holy Spirit, the whole of the ministry would have been no more than a three year wonder like a rock thrown into a pool, causing great ripples for a while but with everything settling back to how things had been before.

When the disciples desert him he will be totally alone. All humanity will be epitomised in him: the remnant of Israel will be himself alone; the people of God under the Old Covenant will be focused in him. But he will be the link between the Old and New; the fulfilment of the one becomes the foundation stone of the other. Yet, he explains, he is not alone because he and the Father are one. The whole of his life has been lived in obedience to the will of the Father who is with him and is expressing himself through him. However, there is a truth which John does not record: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" - which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" [Mat 27:46]. For one terrifying moment as the sin of the world was laid on him, he was indeed separated from the Father whose eyes are too pure to look on evil (Hab. 1:13). The length of time of that separation is unimportant, just as static electricity is earthed in a moment through a connecting metal strip, so the sin of the world is done away in the twinkling of an eye; it is the fact of the separation that is crucial.

Why does John not mention this, especially remembering that he did record the words of the Baptist: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29)? Very probably because the whole of his Gospel illustrates the unity of the Father and the Son. Even if it was necessary for the sin-bearer to be cut off from the righteous holiness of the Father, in fact the Son was never more dear to the Father, never was he more identified with the Father, than when Father and Son together worked the salvation of humankind. The Godhead tore himself apart for our sake.

33. In the upper room that evening Jesus has told the disciples many things - one of their own number will betray him, he is about to leave them, the world will hate them as it hated him, they will be scattered and will desert him. All these things will distress them and might even lead them to abandon their faith because it will seem as though Jesus has failed. However, by warning them in detail of these specific events they will realise that he wasn't taken by the surprise, it is all part of God's plan (see 13:19). Not only did he know he was going to be executed but he knew that they would desert him and yet he still loved them and had promised that they would see him again and that the Holy Spirit would come to dwell in them. It was right that they should be ashamed of their failure and repent of it, but they need not lose heart; they will still be of use to him.

There is another, spiritual, realm which is alongside this one; that is the eternal realm, not this. At the moment this world is all too real with its pain and its unfairness, its ignorance and its selfishness; it is real but it is not eternal. While we live in it we have to ensure that it does not cause us to lose hope and defeat us. We are to live in this world as citizens of heaven; we are ex-pats. As he comes face to face with the Cross, Jesus

gives the great rallying call, "Take heart, I have overcome the world." He accomplished this supremely on the cross, but that is only the culmination of his whole life lived out on earth according to the ways of heaven; not once did he succumb to the ways of the world. Of course, there is the implied corollary - "If you are in me and I am in you, my victory is your victory." (1 John 5:4-5) The triumph of Jesus is more than an encouragement, it is a guarantee.

## Chapter 17

John does not record the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asking to be allowed to avoid the cross and ending with the submission, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Of course, he is not denying that it happened for he was there but, for John, this high priestly prayer, as it is often described, is the climax of the ministry and life of Jesus. It is more than submission, it is active co-operation and participation in the purpose of his Father. If we understand the content of this prayer anything else would be an anticlimax (cf. note on v.4).

1. "After Jesus said this," what does John include in 'this'? Surely everything from the moment that Judas left (13:31), because it was then that Jesus referred to the time of his glorification and here he takes up the same theme. But, whereas there he was talking to men, his disciples, now he turns directly to speaking to his Father. Once again we are faced with the question, 'what is glory?' We have a surface understanding of its meaning, that it is good and positive and that it has something to do with shining light, but we have difficulty in understanding what it is in itself. We know that the Godhead dwells in glory and that that glory does not exist of itself but emanates from God: he is glorious. However, it seems that it does not have a value in itself in the same way as love or truth; as when we say that God is love or is truth. We know that, because Jesus asks the Father to glorify him i.e. glory is not something intrinsic to him (cf. 8:54). The glory of God is created or produced by what he is. (It is wrong to say that love and truth and all the other values which God says "I AM the... ", are produced by or are attributes of God. These are what God is, and it is this which creates the emanation of glory.) If this is so, then because God is love, somehow and somewhere love is the basic ingredient (if that word can be so used) of glory. Love is self-sacrificial, it always gives. It was the self-giving of God, the expression of himself, which brought creation into being. The whole of the life of Jesus was self-sacrificial, culminating in and epitomised by his oblation of himself on the cross. If creation, bringing all things into being by the self-giving God, was a revelation of his glory, so re-creation - the giving of life anew - by the self-giving of the Son, is also a revelation of glory; the glorifying of the Son by the Father and of the Father by the Son. (And, of course, the work and joy of the Spirit is to glorify the Son 16:14. This is his self-giving; all the members of the Godhead are self-giving to each other thus producing what we call 'glory'.) (See also the note on v. 22 re. 'glory'.)

2. However, the glorifying of the Son (and of the Father by the Son) includes more than the cross. It is not only his death, but his resurrection and ascension which are involved. It is the mighty act of breaking through the barrier of sin which encases this world and all that lies within it. By his death, resurrection and ascension to the throne of God, Jesus has made a way, the only way, by which we may enter eternity. He takes with him into the eternal realm all who put their trust in him, all whom the Father gives him out of every nation, not just the Jews. In this sense he is the author of salvation (Heb. 2:10), the one with authority to give eternal life.

3. This verse must surely be a comment by John rather than part of the prayer of Jesus. However, it is totally appropriate because it embraces two truths. One, that there is nothing we can do to earn eternal life. As the previous verse makes clear, it is the gift of Christ. Two, it is not automatically given to all but only to those who know the Father and the Son; and this knowledge is the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer. Salvation is not a matter of understanding the right doctrines, but of relationship. It is the very deepest relationship, for the term 'know' is that used of sexual knowledge between husband and wife. To know God in this way does not lead to eternal life, it is eternal life.

4. Jesus continues the theme of glory. The presentation of God as self-giving love must reveal his glory. The whole of the life of Jesus was a presentation of that self-giving love and so he has brought glory to the Father. That love could not be further extended, it was to the uttermost (13:1), it was even to death on a cross. In a literal sense Jesus would not complete the work until he had actually died, but by sending Judas as he had, he had signed his own death warrant; it was now inevitable. To record the agony in the garden after setting out these words of Jesus would be a diversion from the truths John is seeking to convey in his gospel. It isn't that the agony did not take place, it did and John was there; but its illustration of the willingness of Jesus to do the will of his Father rather than his own, has already been set forth in a deeper way in the words of this prayer

(which the other gospels do not record). They record events; John records the significance of those events. By recording this prayer, John reveals the thought processes of Jesus which lie behind, "Your will, not mine be done."

5. In asking the Father to glorify him, Jesus is self-evidently not glorifying himself. He had a hope set before him of reward if he fulfilled his Father's will (as do we). On the day of atonement, the High Priest took the blood of an animal into the Holy of Holies where the shekinah, the glory of God, dwelt. Jesus was taking his own blood into that glory. At the risk of blasphemy, it is similar to someone who has a very difficult and dangerous task to complete; he reaches the brink, takes a deep breath, says, "Here goes," and jumps.

Jesus refers to the glory he had with his Father before creation. Once again (cf. 8:14-18) we are faced with the problem of how much he 'remembered' of his life before the incarnation. It is impossible for us to know. It may be that because of his unbroken relationship with his Father he had an even more intense experience than that which Paul describes in 2 Cor. 12:2-4 (where he was 'caught up into paradise') and saw anew the state from which he had come.

6. Having begun by speaking of his personal relationship with his Father, Jesus expands this in natural progression to include the completion of his plan - the continuation of the work which he has begun - and refers to those who will carry it on; the eleven. The heart of our Christian Faith is not precepts or doctrines, although these must follow as Jesus is about to make clear; the heart of it is fellowship between persons, the relationship between the Creator and his creatures. Jesus says that he has revealed the Father's name. In Scripture the name is the person, it represents the sum of who the person is. To know a person's name is to have at least some degree of power over them: at its very lowest level it enables us to attract their attention, at its highest it creates full and perfect communion. As Jesus had explained to Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9); Jesus had revealed the Father by allowing the Father to work through him unhindered by any personal desire other than to please his Father. The disciples were coming to understand something of the reality of the spiritual realm, the Kingdom, and had experienced a little of it. After the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, they would more and more live in it. They were being drawn out of the world into life in the Kingdom.

Again we meet the mystery of 'election'. As we have seen, many heard the words of Jesus but so few responded. The twelve (eleven now) had been chosen by the Father and given to the Son in order that the work might go on and the world be saved. To say that they had obeyed the Father's word does not mean that they never sinned (indeed, Peter was to deny him and all were to flee), but rather that they had set their hearts and minds on following the way Jesus had shown them. They might fall from time to time, but their direction in life was right.

7. At last, and probably only in the light of what he had just explained to them (especially 14:9-14 and see 16:29 ff.), they understood that in his earthly ministry Jesus had been totally dependent upon the Father. His authority, wisdom and power had come from his Father.

8. It may seem that this verse does no more than reiterate what is contained in the previous verse. In fact it reveals the depth of truth in these sayings. A word is a means of self-expression (1:1) so in saying that he had given the disciples his Father's words, Jesus is not talking about vocabulary; he is speaking of the total revelation of the Father through himself. They have come to recognise not only that Jesus was 'sent' from the Father, but that that sending brought the Father to them and them to the Father.

9. Jesus prays for the eleven but not in the sense of urgent demanding petition; rather he is lifting them into the presence of the Father. He cannot do that for the world, because the world does not yet believe. Indeed, the world, while it remains the world, 'is under the control of the evil one' (1 John 5:19) and cannot be lifted into the presence of the Father, it has to become the Kingdom. If it is to be won, then those who have seen, and already live in, the reality of the Kingdom, are the ones to win it. So Jesus prays for these eleven as the forerunners of all who will believe through them. In a moment he will extend his prayer to all these also (20).

This understanding of the world as human society alienated from God, permeates the whole of this great high priestly prayer (the word 'world' appears 17 times in these 26 verses).

10. The strength of the prayer of Jesus is that he is not trying to change the Father's will, but is praying in line with that will and so, of course, it will be done. This is the secret of all prayer if it is to be effective. Having said that he prays for the disciples because they are already the Father's who then gave them to him, he affirms that everything he has belongs to the Father. We can and must all say: "for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." (1 Chr 29:14) What is astonishing is that Jesus can go on to say, "and all you have is mine" (see 16:15). What is even more astonishing is that because of Jesus and what he has done for us we can say the same. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom 8:17)

Jesus goes on to say that glory has come to him through his disciples. It is true that the success of one person reflects glory on others:- the manager of a football team usually does not play himself but their success reflects on him. Parents share in the success of their children, teachers of their pupils. However, if it is true that the basis of glory is self-giving love (cf. note on v.1), then Jesus is referring to the fact that, whatever their failings, the disciples had given up their right to their own lives to follow him. As more and more they abandoned their own desires, so he was able to use them and work through them (the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on them and so the miracles they had worked so far must have been an extension of his own power through them) and this brought glory to him.

11. Hidden in this verse is the total plan for the redemption of the world. Jesus had brought the Kingdom to earth. If (as 'the Lord's Prayer' makes clear) the Kingdom is where the will of God is done, then he had perfectly fulfilled that will in himself. But now his personal earthly ministry is to end. It is as though he is saying, "Father I am leaving the world, but it is all right, the work will go on because we have these eleven men to whom I have given your word and revealed your name. They have understood it, they have given up their right to their own lives and so the work will go on. The redemption of the world which I am about to accomplish, depends for the whole of mankind for all time upon these eleven ordinary men. So it is all right, isn't it?" The amazing thing is that it was! it is!

There is an apocryphal story of the ascended Jesus being asked by the angels what plan he had in order to bring in the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus replied, "I have left eleven men on earth who know the truth. They will bring in the Kingdom." The angels asked, "But what if they fail? what other plan do you have?" Jesus answered, "I have no other plan."

The reason why Jesus was so confident was that he was coming to the Father. His return to the Father was closely connected to the sending of the Holy Spirit (16:7). This echoes 14:12 where Jesus states that everyone who has faith in him will do the same works that he had done and even greater things, "because I am going to the Father," and the same Holy Spirit who was in him will be in them "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever". If it is the same Spirit, then it is not surprising if he works the same works through them as he had worked through Jesus.

Jesus uses the term 'Holy Father'. This is the only occasion where John records the word 'holy', *hagios*, (although he is to use the verb from the same root in vv. 17 and 19 where it is translated 'sanctify'). The basic meaning is 'that which is set apart.' In its context here, where Jesus is so aware of the alienation of the world (cf. note on v. 9 above), it is natural that he should contrast this with the holiness - set-apartness - of his Father.

If the eleven are to succeed, not only must they have within them the same Holy Spirit who had operated through Jesus but, because they are to operate in the hostile environment of the world, they need protection. Shortly (15), Jesus is to specify that it is above all protection from the evil one in whom the world lies (1 John 5:19) that they need. The protection is the power of the name of God which is also the name he, the Father, bestowed on him, Jesus. Being the name of God it is 'the name above every name' (Philp. 2:9). (For an explanation of the significance of a name cf. note on v.6 above and v.12 below.)

Jesus prays that the eleven may be one as he and his Father are one. At the time Jesus spoke this there were no denominations; the splits had not yet happened. However, Jesus knew the state of the human heart, the state of the world and the tactics of Satan - divide and rule. It has been said often that Jesus was not seeking uniformity but unity. In a choir the members do not all sing the same note but they sing the same piece of music in perfect harmony. So within the Godhead; there are three persons with different roles, but they are united in purpose and work in perfect harmony. Once again, what lies behind the thinking of Jesus here is the dis-ease of the world contrasted with the harmony of the eternal, spiritual realm of the Kingdom. (cf. 21)

12. During his incarnate ministry Jesus had a particular form of relationship with his disciples which enabled them to minister as an extension of his own ministry. I have experienced something similar when, at a large meeting or rally, I have been called, together with others, to assist the speaker - someone who has a widely recognised ministry (possibly of healing). As I have prayed for people they have responded in a manner identical to that of those receiving ministry directly from the leader himself and which is not the manner in which people usually respond to my own ministry. It is as though his particular ministry has been temporarily extended through me.

The disciples, sent out on pairs, had preached, healed and cast out demons; yet the Holy Spirit had not at that time been poured out upon them. It was an extension of Jesus' own ministry. There is a sense, of course, in which our ministry today is an extension of his ministry but there is a fundamental difference. The same Spirit who worked the works of his Father through him (14:10-12) now indwells us and continues to work those works.

Jesus has in mind here the distinction between the two types of relationship between himself and his disciples. While he was on earth he kept them safe by the name which the Father had given him; that is by the manifestation of the Father through himself - he totally represented his Father. That relationship was about to end and, at Pentecost, a new and even more intimate relationship was to be formed. Jesus would actually dwell within his disciples (as would his Father) through the presence of the Holy Spirit (14: 20 and 23). It is this change in relationship which probably lies behind the remark of the risen (but not ascended) Jesus to Mary that she should not hold onto him (20:17): the old relationship was ended and the new had not yet been established.

The 'name' of Jesus given by the Father as the manifestation of the totality of the Godhead, was powerful in his earthly ministry but it was localised to where he happened to be. Now it is unlimited and at that name every knee must bow, in heaven, on earth and under the earth (Philp. 2:10).

The fact that Judas fell away was not due to any failure in the power of that 'name' but rather that this was ordained in the purposes of God. There is a mystery here as to how free Judas was to betray or not to betray Jesus. I repeat my comment on 13:18 - "What is clear, however, is that whilst Judas helped to fulfil the Father's plan by betraying Jesus, he is, nonetheless, fully responsible for his own actions: 'The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'" [Mat 26:24]

Strictly the translation is, 'son of destruction'. "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss; not of being, but of well-being" (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary). Somewhere along the line, certainly long before Satan had actually entered him that very evening (13:27), Judas had fallen to his temptation. As Jesus had told the Jews, "You belong to your Father, the devil, and you want to carry out his desires" (8:44). Those desires are to destroy, to do all the harm and damage that he can to God's creation and plans while he still has the opportunity. "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." (Rev 12:12) Following the desires of 'his father', Judas had stolen from the common purse, which was intended to provide for the needs of Jesus and all twelve of his disciples (12:6). He had sought to denigrate (destroy) the beautiful act of Mary in anointing Jesus with the precious ointment, (12:5) and even now he was about his business of trying to destroy Jesus by betraying him to the Jewish authorities. We must bear in mind that at

the time Jesus uttered these words, the disciples listening to him (apart from John and possibly Peter) were unaware that he was speaking of Judas or that he had gone to betray him.

It is all of a piece; the whole of this prayer springs from the concept in the mind of Jesus of the two realms, the world and the Kingdom, and the great gulf fixed between the two. The glorious truth is that nothing can prevail against the Kingdom. The name of Jesus has kept the eleven and will continue to keep the Church, when that comes into being shortly, all down the ages. Those who would destroy the Kingdom will themselves be destroyed by it. That was the fate of Judas, who thus was indeed the 'son of destruction', and it is the fate of Satan, of which he is well aware. We fight an enemy who knows, even now, that he is destined to lose; what a tremendous advantage that is!

13. All good teachers teach in progression from what is already understood to a new truth and, when that is grasped, from that to the next truth. Here, however, Jesus is speaking to his Father, and his thoughts are not so much a progression but a moving back and forth over the whole of his comprehension of the eternal truth. So 'these things' which he speaks now are both the words he has already spoken and the words he is about to speak.

As he has already explained (13:19), he is revealing these truths now, while he is in the world and before he returns to his Father, so that, far from being devastated by the sudden realisation that Judas is a traitor and by his own arrest, trial and crucifixion, the disciples will understand that it is all in the plan of God fully known to him all along. The loss of the 'son of destruction' was no failure in the power of Jesus to keep his own; the apparent victory of the enemy in putting Jesus on the cross was, in fact, the defeat of that enemy. With this understanding, the disciples would go out into the world, sent about the business of the Kingdom (18), certain that whatever opposition and tribulation they were to experience, they were on the winning side and they would be kept unto eternity. All authority had been given to Jesus (Matt. 28:18). He spoke these truths before they had been proved so that, when they were, the disciples' confidence would be confirmed and the full measure of the joy which Jesus knew might be in them.

14. See note on v.8. Jesus continues his prayer from his overall perspective of the world in relation to the Kingdom. He has revealed the eternal truth and, however imperfectly, the disciples have recognised it. It is an illustration of what he had explained to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (3:3). They had been born again of the Spirit, they had 'seen' the Kingdom and, having seen it, they would never be the same again; that was the realm where they desired to live their lives for eternity, and so they were no longer 'of the world' anymore than Jesus was. No wonder that the world hated them. Those who see the Kingdom of God and seek to live in the light of that knowledge are a condemnation of the way of the world simply because of who they are, not because they seek to judge others.

15. However, it was important that the work Jesus had begun should continue. He was about to leave the world so they must remain in it but with the same Spirit in them who had worked the Father's work through him so that they might do the things he had done and even greater things (14:10-13). So Jesus prayed, not that the Father would remove them from it, but keep or protect them in it. While he was with them he had kept them in his name and he had already asked the Father to keep them in his name (11) although the two are one. At this very moment Satan was seeking to destroy Jesus through one of the disciples, Judas, so he prays specifically that the Father will protect these eleven from the evil one because the world in which they are to operate lies under his control (1 John 5:19).

16. Jesus reiterates that neither they nor he are of the world (14) as the basis for his petition in the next verse.

17. The word 'sanctify' is from the same root as the word 'Holy' in v.11. It has the meaning of setting apart for a holy purpose or task and was used of a sacrifice. It does not mean cleanse or purify; the disciples were already clean in the eyes of God (15:3). (The Protestant Church makes a distinction between justification and sanctification in a way that the Roman Church does not.) To consecrate or sanctify is a positive act done to those who are (or that which is) already clean - the Passover Lamb had to be spotless before it could be offered.

It involves dedication and sacrifice on the part of the one to be sanctified, and provision or equipping for service on the part of God (hence Aaron was 'consecrated' a priest). Because the disciples were not of the world they were fit to be set apart for a holy purpose.

Why did Jesus link their consecration to 'the truth'? Because truth is ultimate reality and the ultimate reality is not this material world, however real it may seem; it is destined for destruction. It is the spiritual realm which is eternal reality and that cannot be seen with physical sight. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14). As the disciples walk in the light of the Kingdom, they will be enlightened and equipped for service by the Holy Spirit who will guide them into all truth (16:13). God's word, the revelation of himself, his self-expression, is truth. Hence Jesus, who is supremely the Word of God, could claim to be the truth (14:6). The word of God which is truth - the revelation of himself - includes the words of Scripture, but is more than that because he reveals himself in other ways also. (See on 8 above) So the consecration of the disciples, whilst it is for service in the world, is actually to the eternal realm of the Kingdom.

18. The Father sent the Son into the world to bring in the Kingdom. Now the Son sends the disciples into the world to do the same. That is to say, to do for those who are in the world what Jesus had done for them - translate them from being of the world to being of the Kingdom. Of course, there is a fundamental difference which is not mentioned here because a full explanation would confuse the issue. It has been said rightly that Jesus came not only to proclaim the gospel ('good news') but to create the gospel to proclaim. Only he could be the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). Also, of course, Jesus was to say, "Follow me," and the disciples would say, "Follow him." However, the truth that lies behind what Jesus is saying is that the work which the Father sent him into the world to begin would not finish now that he was returning to heaven. It would be continued in and through the disciples. Indeed, henceforth they would be known as apostles (from the verb 'to send') rather than disciples (learners).

19. Strictly speaking, no one can sanctify or consecrate him or herself. It is done by another. The most we can do is offer ourselves. However, Jesus does sanctify himself. He has the right to do so for he is himself Holy God. For what purpose does he do this? He explains that it is for the sake of the eleven and for their sanctification. It may seem that it is being unnecessarily pedantic to differentiate between redemption and sanctification (as already mentioned, the Roman Catholic Church does not do so as clearly as the Protestant Churches). However, as already explained (17) Jesus is not here thinking of redeeming the eleven (i.e. cleansing them from sin) but of making them holy; fit and fitted for service. For this to happen they must not only be brought into the Kingdom, they must live in it, walk in it - even while they walk in the world. From one aspect, by his death on the cross he opened the way for them to enter the Kingdom, from another he made all the resources of the Kingdom available to them. Redeeming the disciples was a once and for all act; sanctifying them is an on-going process to which Jesus now consecrates himself. The work goes on and it is still the work of Jesus but now he will work through them.

20. However, the work is not to be confined to the lifetime of the apostles; it is to go on until the end of time. All believers are to be sent as the eleven are sent. Jesus looks ahead and prays for those who through the years, will believe in him though the witness of those first apostles. That includes us. Isn't it true that we believe today because of their faithfulness? We, you and I, have been prayed for by Jesus during his earthly ministry.

The eleven believed the words that Jesus gave them; words given him by the Father (8). They, in turn, made the same proclamation of the eternal truth and it is still being made today and it still wins men and women to faith.

21. As already mentioned (note on v.11), at the time Jesus was speaking, divisions had not yet arisen between denominations, for the Church was not yet in being. Whilst it is important that there should be visible unity between the denominations, Jesus is thinking of something deeper than our attempts to bring this about. The

unity that Jesus knows is not 'brought about' by human beings, it already exists because of who we are. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. If we are truly in Christ and he is in us, then we are already living in the eternal realm of love which is the basis of our unity. It isn't a matter of expressing our worship, or of ordering our churches, in different ways; it isn't even a matter of holding different interpretations of some aspects of the Christian Faith, even when these contradict each other and may involve errors which need to be corrected. Basically the Christian Faith is a matter of relationship not doctrine (which John has made clear right at the beginning of his recording of this prayer of Jesus [3]) - relationship with God through Jesus, and that brings us automatically into relationship with everyone else who shares that same relationship with God. Incidentally, it is this understanding which pervades all that underlies the teaching of the Letter to the Ephesians (see particularly 3:14-4:6).

The KJV has an unfortunate translation (which, curiously, is repeated in the New KJV and also in the Jerusalem Bible) when it reads - "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us". The second 'one' is not in the original and the text should read simply, "that they may be in us." Perhaps this error epitomises the difficulty we have today in our search for unity. We concentrate on being 'one'. If we would all seek the deeper reality to be truly in God with all that that means, we might more easily recognise and display the unity we already have and begin to sort out our differences within the bond of love and peace which the Godhead enjoy.

Of course, if we are truly 'in' God then we will manifest a true revelation of who he is. Just as the disciples recognised the truth that the Father had sent the Son (8) so those with eyes to see will recognise that truth in us and will also believe that the Father sent the Son.

22-23. This is difficult to comprehend. Again in this prayer Jesus refers to glory (cf. notes on 1,4,5 and 10). However, he says that he has "given them the glory you gave me." How has he done this and what does it mean?

I have come to believe that normally glory is seen only from the eternal Kingdom. (I say 'normally' because Moses' face shone with reflected glory, which could be seen by the Israelites, whenever he came from the presence of the Lord [Ex. 34:33-35].) On earth, the disciples saw Jesus crucified but the beings in heaven saw him glorified. We can intellectually grasp, at least to some extent, the fact that the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross brought him glory, but we cannot see it. It is interesting that John, the most spiritual of the four gospels, records Jesus as speaking of being 'glorified' (12:23) and uses that term himself when speaking of the cross (apart from his description of the actual crucifixion), whereas Matthew records Jesus using the term 'crucified' (Matt. 20:19). Scripture would seem to support this understanding of glory being seen only from the kingdom, because Jesus would shortly express his desire that his followers should see his glory (24), so presumably the disciples did not see it at the time he was speaking and, therefore, were certainly not able to see the glory that he had given to them.

It is important to remember that here Jesus is not thinking only of the eleven but of all who would believe in him because of their word (20). Apparently, therefore, we have a glory about us which we do not see. This may be related to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory." (Eph 1:13-14) I understand that Satanists claim to be able to recognise Christians; and those who have what we refer to as 'second sight' say that they can see an aura around those who are under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Notice that Paul links it all to 'the praise of his glory'. He goes on:- "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." (Eph 3:10) I would not want to draw more from these words than the Holy Spirit has written into them. What is certain, however, is that there is much more going on 'behind the scenes' in the eternal spiritual realm than we can see, and we are playing a far more important role in the purposes of God than we realise.

If believers are truly in God and if, through his Spirit, God is in them, more and more will Christ in his glory, be formed in them (Gal. 4:19). Self-giving love flowing between believers will inevitably reveal unity between

them just as it does within the members of the Godhead. Such love, unity and glory are all bound up together. That is why, in this prayer, Jesus moves effortlessly in thought between all three. These are the marks of the Kingdom, not of the world where the emphasis is on getting rather than giving. And so, to live in this way, which is the way of the Spirit, demonstrates the reality of the Kingdom to the world. We love because we are secure in the knowledge that we are loved by the Father and the Son who gave himself for us. Kingdom life when it is made real for all to see, challenges the world.

24. The literal translation of the original would be cumbersome but it contains a truth which our currently used versions do not convey. "That which you have given me, I desire that they should be with me." The former phrase implies a unity but the pronoun shows that that unity is made up of a number of individuals. Surely it is not reading too much into it (especially in the context of the thought of Jesus here that the work is to go on even though he is to be taken into heaven) to see a reference to the Church as his body on earth.

Here we see the heart of Jesus; he loves his own and does not want to be separated from them. However, it is not that he wants to stay with them where they are, but that they should join him where he is (14:3). Once again, he does not say, "where I will be," but "where I am". It is that same phrase which occurs so frequently and significantly in this gospel, "I AM..." If any other person were to say, "That they may see my glory," it might well appear boastful; but this is for the benefit and joy of those who belong to him, not for himself. It is like a rich landowner who has gone to some foreign country to win his bride, longing to bring her home and show her the wonderful house and estate he has inherited from his father and which she will share with him. As the Book of Revelation makes clear, to behold the glory of the Lamb on the throne is the eternal joy of the whole company of heaven.

The Son rejoices in the knowledge that he was loved by the Father, even before the creation of the world ("In the beginning was the Word") and his heart leaps at the remembrance of this knowledge; but it is more than this - he has just said that the Father loves those who love him, the Son, with the same love with which he, the Father, loves the Son (23) and they are the 'given ones'; given him by the Father (9). This prayer is a whole, spoken from the perspective of eternity, and Jesus moves from one truth to another and back again in his comprehension of this spiritual reality. He looks beyond the cross to the joy of what it will accomplish; the reconciliation of all creation in glory, joy, love, unity and peace.

25. The climax of the prayer has been reached and the future is assured, for it is in the hands of the Father who is totally just and righteous. Nevertheless, the world is still alienated, it does not know its Creator nor the one whom he has sent. But that one, Jesus himself, does know (recognise and acknowledge) him, and those who believe in Jesus recognise who he is and that he has come from the Father. It is this knowledge which is eternal life (3).

26. Jesus has begun the work by making the Father's name (6) known to them (these eleven) and the work will go on because Jesus will continue to make the Father known through those who, all down the years while time lasts, will also come to believe. Although Jesus has sat down at the right hand of God, although he cried out triumphantly, "It is finished," (19:30) that refers to the work of reconciliation on the cross; the work of proclaiming that reconciliation goes on, and Jesus is involved in it through those whom the Father has given to him. He is in them, in us (23).

With all that he has said about unity, glory and love, it is love which dominates his thoughts, for God is love. It is possible to take the words of Jesus here as meaning that the love which the Father has for the Son might be in believers so that they will have the same love for the Son as the Father has. Certainly our love for the Son is not as deep as it ought to be. However, this is unlikely to be the main thrust of the petition. Rather it is that the love which exists within the Godhead; the Father for the Son and the Spirit, the Son for the Spirit and the Father, the Spirit for the Father and the Son; that love which accelerated within them, the Trinity, to burst forth in the desire to create others whom to love and resulted in the creation of humankind - it is that love which Jesus prays may be in us.

## Chapter 18

The whole of this gospel is a personal reflection by John of his time with Jesus. However, the description of the betrayal and other events of that terrible night were etched upon his memory and as we read we become witnesses ourselves, so vivid is the account by one who so obviously was there.

1-2. NIV refers to an olive grove but the Greek *kepos* means simply 'a garden'. Matthew and Mark record that it was called Gethsemane, which means 'oil press'. Almost certainly, therefore, this would have been privately owned and, no doubt, the owner was a friend who made the garden available to Jesus. Even today, with the busy traffic along the roads nearby, the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives offer an oasis of peace. Although there is no mention of Jesus having previously told the disciples that he would be going to this place after the meal, they had been there so frequently in the past that Judas was aware that is where he would find them. Some commentators believe that Jesus went there deliberately to enable Judas to find him easily, i.e. it was in line with his statement in 10:18 that no one would take his life from him but he would lay it down as an act of will. However, there is no need to assume that. Jesus was not influenced by what Judas was doing; we know from the other gospels that he needed to find a place where he could pray privately. John does not refer to that prayer because it adds nothing to his purpose. He has recorded the high-priestly prayer of chapter 17, which the others do not mention (see the introductory note to chapter 17).

In referring to the betrayal, NIV does not bring out the tense of the verb; the meaning is, "Judas, who was in the act of betraying him."

3. John's description clearly implies that it was not only the temple guard who came with Judas (these Jewish 'police' were the officers or 'officials from the chief priests'). The priests had also obtained some troops from the Roman authorities. During the Passover festivities, in order to keep the peace, the size of the garrison regularly stationed near the temple would have been increased. The word used, 'cohort', means that there may well have been a considerable detachment of regular soldiers. It must have been unnerving in the quiet of the night to be surrounded by all these men with their torches and their lanterns and their weapons - John's recollection is so graphic. Is it reading too much into the description to believe that John has the thought in mind, "torches and lanterns to look for the 'Light of the world' and weapons to overcome the 'Prince of peace' who created those who carried them?"

4-6. Again, John stresses the fact that Jesus was in control and knows all that was going to happen to him. Whereas the three other gospels record that Judas had arranged to identify Jesus to the guards by kissing him, John makes clear that, in fact, this was unnecessary because Jesus took the initiative and went towards them and when, in reply to his question, they said that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth he immediately admitted, "I am he." However, although he does not record the incident of the kiss, John draws attention to the fact that Judas was present and he does it in such a way that he conveys the unspoken comment, "While this terrible event was taking place, Judas, who was his friend, was standing there watching." Having mentioned Judas, John turns back immediately to the person of Jesus and records a strange incident - the guard fell back to the ground. On a purely human level it might be argued that the fact that Jesus did not attempt to escape but actually offered himself for arrest, took the guard by surprise and for a moment they were nonplussed. But this does not do justice to the way John describes the scene. They were in disarray. Surely it is not coincidence that the statement of Jesus is, once again in this gospel, the royal and divine statement, "I AM" (in English we have to add the pronoun 'he'). Here, for a moment, the deity of Jesus which, during his earthly ministry has been 'veiled in flesh', breaks through. The creature falls before its creator.

7-8. So, again, Jesus has to take the initiative. He repeats the question and they the answer, to which he responds, "I told you that I am he." He is still totally in command, it is important that the disciples should not be implicated with him in his arrest, trial and sentence; first, because they can have no part in the salvation of the world which he alone is to accomplish; and, secondly, because they must be free to take the gospel into the world. When they begin to do that they will attract more than enough hostility themselves, but at least let them begin the proclamation.

9. Earlier in his ministry Jesus had said that it was the Father's will that he should lose none of those whom he had given him (6:39), and John relates the plea of Jesus to his captors to let the disciples go to the fulfilling of that statement. It didn't just happen that none was lost, Jesus actively ensured it.

10. At the supper, when Jesus explained that he was to leave his disciples and where he was going they could not follow, Peter, with his usual but endearing impulsiveness, had asked why could he not follow - he was ready to die for him (13:37). Here, we see it was no idle boast. The temple police and the armed soldiers would have outnumbered the little band greatly, even if we do not take the word 'cohort' (3) to imply the numbers usually associated with that term. It was very likely that by drawing and using his sword Peter would be killed. Later, when challenged privately, he would be fearful and deny his Lord three times, as Jesus had foretold (13:38). This may illustrate a profound truth about the human character and the work of Satan but the fact here is that Peter was failing Jesus in his loyalty as much as in his betrayal. His attempt to fight and defend Jesus was against the will of God and as such, albeit out of ignorance, was sin.

11. Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. All four gospels record this event and Luke, alone, records that Jesus healed him. Whatever the reason why Matthew and Mark do not record the healing no doubt John omits it because he has carefully selected just seven miracles in his gospel and he calls them signs because they point to a deeper, spiritual truth he wishes to explain. The healing of this man's ear would add nothing to what he has already shared and would be a diversion from his narrative. However, John mentions the name of the servant - Malchus. Probably he alone of the disciples knew it because, he tells us, he was known to the high priest (15).

John has recorded how, in his great high priestly prayer, Jesus had consecrated himself to the will of his Father. All three of the other evangelists detail the prayer in the garden where Jesus had asked that this cup might pass from him; nevertheless, it is the Father's will rather than his own that must be done. Here we see the determination of Jesus to fulfil that will, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Again and again we see that the one in command of the situation is not from amongst those who are armed, it is the prisoner; his life is not taken from him, it is given.

12. The binding of Jesus (which probably means simply that his hands were tied behind him) symbolises Satan's hour. The Prince of Life is in the hands of those he created and will remain so until he is freed by death and resurrection.

13-14. Officially there was only one high priest at a time and in the Jewish tradition he held the office for life. However, under the Roman occupation he was, of course, subject to the Governor or Procurator. Annas had been appointed high priest by Quirinius (see Luke 2:2 & 3:2) but had been deposed by Valerius Gratus who was Procurator before Pontius Pilate. Over the years several of his sons became high priest and at the time of the arrest of Jesus Caiaphas, son-in-law to Annas, held the post. Nevertheless throughout it all Annas was the real power behind the throne. The family was immensely rich; no doubt made so by the profits from the traders in the temple. So Annas, above all, would have had reason to hate Jesus who had denounced these traders and thrown them out. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus was taken first to Annas before any official trial.

15-16. John breaks off his narrative in order to relate what was happening meanwhile to Peter. Although initially all the disciples fled (Matt. 26:55 & Mark 14:50) two disciples remained near enough, or actually returned, to watch what happened and followed Jesus and the group. One of these was Peter and the other is unnamed. It may have been any of them; even Judas has been suggested because, having negotiated the betrayal, he would be known to the priests. However, by this time the other disciples would realise what he had done and it is unlikely that he would wish to be with them anymore than they with him. Traditionally it is believed that the disciple involved was John himself. Just why he should have been known to the high priest we do not know. There are various speculations; an ancient writer, Polycrates, states that John was, himself, a priest; another suggestion is that John's father, Zebedee, was a comparatively wealthy (he employed 'hired

men' [Mark 1:20]) supplier of salt fish to Annas and his family which John would deliver. Whatever the reason, John was able to follow the arresting party into the courtyard of the high priest's house, while Peter had to remain outside. Realising this, John goes back to the entrance and speaks to the servant-girl on duty there and brings Peter in also.

17. The way in which the girl phrases her question is important. The other three evangelists phrase it differently: Matthew and Mark have her addressing Peter with "You also were with Jesus"; whereas Luke reports that she did not address Peter but rather those nearby, "This man also was with him." They all agree that it was a woman who first challenged him. However, assuming that the other disciple was indeed John, then it is most likely that he actually heard the question and he reports that it was asked in such a way as to expect a negative answer - "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" It was so much easier to go along with the expectation and, having once done so, for Peter the die was cast and the two further denials followed inevitably. It is easy to blame Peter for lack of faith when walking on the water, but he was the only disciple who even tried to do it. Similarly we may look down on him for denying that he knew Jesus but, with John (?), he was the only disciple who dared to follow Jesus when he was arrested. He failed but it was in a situation the others had not dared to face.

18. Once again we sense that we are hearing an eyewitness account; John was there. There is a significance about John's mention of the fire which will become clear when we consider 21:9; it was not a fire of ordinary wood but one of charcoal. Whether John was standing with Peter or whether he had been able to go in to hear Annas interrogating Jesus we do not know.

19. The way John tells the tale heightens the interest for he leaves the scene outside with Peter by the fire to continue the story of what is happening to Jesus inside. The intention of Annas, of course, is to try to find evidence which will build a case which the Jews can take to Pilate. It was totally out of order because Jewish law forbade any attempt to get the accused to convict himself, such evidence was inadmissible. As Hendriksen points out, the whole thing was a farce; the appearance before Annas and then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin was not a trial but a plot.

20-21. So Jesus points out that any evidence they need is already available to them because he has spoken publicly and they can question the many who have heard him. He claims that he has said nothing in secret. That is true because, whilst he did teach his disciples when others were not around, he was only explaining in greater depth what he had taught publicly.

22. It is hardly necessary to reflect that it was illegal for one of the temple guard to hit Jesus, whose hands were still bound, (the original makes it plain that he slapped his face with his open palm). It was all a put-up job anyway and there was no pretence that this was a legal trial. It may well be that this underling hoped to curry favour with Annas. The horrific reality is that this man struck his Creator.

23. All Jesus had done in his answer to the high priest was to remind him of the proper procedure and so he calmly states the truth of the situation. If he has committed some offence, then specify what it is; if not, then give a reason for striking him.

24. Annas realises that he will obtain no information from Jesus which will incriminate him, all he is doing is pointing out where this interrogation is illegal, and so he sends him, still bound, to the 'official' high priest, Caiaphas, for a manipulated official trial, which John does not describe.

25-27. John reverts to what is going on in the courtyard, contrasting throughout his narrative the behaviour of Jesus and Peter under questioning. From the account of the other gospels it seems that at some stage Peter had tried to withdraw himself from too much public contact (Matt. 26:71). However he is back round the fire. Perhaps there was something in his behaviour which attracted attention - maybe being with the others warming themselves but holding back and not joining in the conversation. Whatever the reason someone says

to him, again phrasing the question to expect the answer, 'no'; "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" And, again, it is all too easy for Peter to answer, "I am not".

Peter is challenged a third time, but on this occasion it is in a far more positive manner and it is by someone who was present when Jesus was arrested. Indeed it is a relative of the man, Malchus, whose ear had been cut off by Peter himself. Little wonder that the man thought he recognised Peter. This time it isn't a matter of falling in with the line of questioning and saying, "you are right, I am not one of them;" it is a vehement refutation.

The NIV wording, 'a cock began to crow,' is literally, 'the cock crew.' The point of explaining that is that the phrase may well refer to a trumpet blast which marked the change from the third to the fourth watch of the night and which was known as 'the cock crow.' It may well be that when Jesus warned Peter that "before the cock crows you will disown me three times" (13:38), he was speaking of a specific time rather than the random event of some nearby cock deciding to crow at that moment.

28. John does not refer to the 'official' trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin or the interrogation by Herod, all of which the other gospels report in detail. This may be because he is aware that the facts of that are already widely known, but it could be that little would be served by recounting it. He has already shown that the whole procedure was a mockery, Caiaphas had decided that Jesus had to die (11:49/50). The Jews, under Roman rule, had no authority to put anyone to death and so they needed to persuade the Governor to pass the death sentence. Pilate was probably aware that something was afoot because, presumably, it was he who had authorised the sending of soldiers with the temple police to arrest Jesus. Even allowing for the 'trial' it was still very early in the morning. The Jews stand outside the palace because, as the home of a Gentile, they would have been made ceremonially unclean had they entered it and they wanted to be ritually clean so that they could partake of the Passover that day (see next paragraph). John enhances the drama by relating the interchange of Pilate between the two parties, Jesus inside the palace and the Jews outside. The irony of the situation is remarkable. The Jews were seeking to maintain relationship with God by keeping what they believed to be the law while, if only they had the eyes to see, he was amongst them.

Commentators differ widely regarding the phrase 'they wanted to be able to eat the Passover'. Some claim that there is a discrepancy between John and the synoptic gospels in that Jesus died (on the Friday) at the very time that lambs were being slaughtered in the temple for the Passover that evening - i.e. the one the Jewish leaders wanted to be ceremonially clean to keep. In which case, the feast that Jesus had kept with his disciples on the Thursday could not have been the true Passover. Other commentators claim that the Passover lasted over a period of seven days. The day of the actual Passover meal itself was the Thursday (so Jesus had observed the true Passover) and that the meal the leaders were referring to was the Chagigah which was eaten on the day after the Passover supper itself, but was still regarded as part of the Passover festivities. A third suggestion is that the true Passover was indeed observed on the Thursday but the Jewish leaders had been so determined to capture and judge Jesus that they had postponed their participation in the Passover until the Friday. It seems that all the evangelists agree that the Last Supper was held on the Thursday and the point at issue is was it the true Passover or not.

29. Almost certainly Pilate found the Jews tiresome; it would be difficult for him to follow all the details of their religion and from other sources it seems that he did not even try; and here they were troubling him very early in the morning refusing to come into the palace to present their case formally. So he asks what are the charges that they are bringing against Jesus.

30. They do not want to specify because their real charge is blasphemy (and even this is not the true reason for their desire to have Jesus killed, which is his challenge to their authority) and they know that Pilate would not want to get involved in what he would see as niceties of their religion. So they try to get away without detailing any charge - "we would not have brought him to you unless he were a criminal."

31. Pilate sees through this and does exactly what they feared; he tells them to deal with Jesus under their own laws, which brings their purpose into the open, “we have no right to execute anyone.” This must have made Pilate uneasy. Not that he was unwilling to execute people, he could be cruel and ruthless, but he had clashed with these people whom he had to govern before, and they had reported him to Caesar. He could see a nasty situation developing.

32. Jesus had already prophesied that he would die by being ‘lifted up’; the Jewish method of execution was by stoning, it was the Romans who used crucifixion.

33-35. Pilate leaves the Jews and goes in to talk with Jesus, asking him if he is the king of the Jews. There has been no public accusation that Jesus had made this claim although the Jewish leaders had very likely told Pilate this when, the night before, they had asked for soldiers to help arrest him. However, they had been unable to obtain any proof of this that would convince Pilate. Nevertheless, Pilate was aware of it and asks Jesus if he is indeed the king of the Jews. There is a stress on the word ‘you’. What sort of person was Pilate expecting? Here was an apparently ordinary man with no armed band of followers - hardly the man to lead a rebellion; could he really be the cause of so much impassioned hatred on the part of the Jewish leaders? So in some surprise Pilate asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Most prisoners would be either cowed or belligerent, but Jesus calmly questions Pilate, “Is this something you have wondered for yourself or has someone else fed that idea to you?” Pilate’s concern is to govern the province and what Jesus is or is not to the Jews is not his affair provided he causes no trouble. He explains that to Jesus, “I am not a Jew and I haven’t arrested you; it’s your own people who have brought you before me. Just what is it you have done?”

36. Underlying the whole of John’s gospel is his understanding that there is a spiritual realm alongside this world; that is eternal, this is not. Although, in one sense, the kingdom of heaven is a place we go to after this life, it is a spiritual realm we may enter now. In its absolute sense Jesus is a king, but that title needs reinterpretation because as applied to him it is so very different from what it implies to the world. So Jesus explains that his kingdom is not of this world. Who are the servants Jesus refers to? Are they the disciples (who are in this world) or the angels (who are from the spiritual realm) of whom he spoke when Peter did try to defend him with his sword (Matt. 26:53)? Jesus clearly associates his arrest with the Jews and not the Romans. He assures Pilate that his Kingdom is from another place. The wording is carefully chosen because it is not entirely separate from this world and eventually it is to embrace the world which it will transform and reconcile. It is similar to the thought behind his statement that his disciples are not of the world yet he has sent them into the world (17:14, 16, 17).

37. Again there is a stress on the ‘you’, “so you are a king!”. Pilate’s comment has still something of a question in it. The N.I.V. translation of the reply Jesus makes is probably going too far in implying a complete agreement, although Hendriksen claims it is similar to our colloquialism, “You’ve said it!” It is more likely that Jesus wants to convey a reluctance to use that term because of its worldly connotations, but not to dismiss it altogether. “That word is yours; but, yes, the purpose of my coming into the world has been to witness to the eternal truth and everyone who is of that truth responds to me.”

38. We have to make up our own minds as to how Pilate spoke the words, “What is truth?” Was it cynical, as many commentators assume, or was there a trace of the wistful? It seems that he had never taken the time or trouble really to understand these Jews whom he was supposed to govern and history shows him to be capable of cruelty. It may well be that underlying his question is the attitude, “I have enough problems holding my job without getting involved with philosophical argument.” The practicality was that, having interviewed Jesus, Pilate was convinced he was no threat to the state and he goes outside to the Jews to tell them so. However, knowing their mood he attempts a compromise. It is the custom at Passover for him to release a prisoner and although Jesus has been convicted of no crime it may be that by offering to release him this will be accepted as Pilate having passed judgement on him and so satisfying the demand of the Jews to find him guilty, yet not actually having to carry out any sentence. The whole thing is a fudge because, having been found guilty of no

crime by the Governor himself, Jesus should be released anyway. So Pilate asks if he should release 'the king of the Jews.'

This reveals how little he understands the situation. The last thing the Jewish leaders want is for Jesus to be regarded as the king of their nation, indeed it is their assertion that he claims to be king which is the crime. From John's account it appears that the response of the crowd follows immediately. In fact Matthew (27:19) makes it clear that it was at this stage that Pilate receives a message from his wife telling him about a vivid dream she has had about Jesus and warning Pilate not to get involved in the situation. Apparently this diverts his attention long enough for the priests to persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released instead of Jesus. Although Barabbas was a robber and murderer (Luke 23:19, Acts 3:14) he had also led a rebellion, which must have been against Rome and which would have given him some status in the eyes of the Jews, and so it may not have been all that difficult to persuade the people.

From the way he refers to Barabbas, so simply and starkly, John makes an unstated comment; "the world had the choice between the bringer of life and the bringer of death, and chose death".

## Chapter 19

1-3. The saga continues. The struggle within Pilate (his own judgement that Jesus is innocent combined with his wife's warning but the need to placate the Jews) is acted out on the body of Jesus. First he had treated Jesus as a criminal in offering to release him as a convicted prisoner when there had been no valid trial; now he has him scourged in the hope that that will satisfy the Jews. Scourging was a terrible torture - men could die under it, and the subsequent mocking behaviour of the soldiers gives an insight into their attitude. There would have been no pity or mercy, the flogging would have been vicious. They offer spurious obeisance and immediately follow it with a smack in the face.

4-5. Pilate is still seeking to release Jesus. This is not because he has any real concern for him, he is thinking of himself. He has a duty to uphold the Roman law and he does not want to court trouble by failing to do so. However, he is under great pressure from the priests. He has already granted them the soldiers who arrested Jesus the night before and they are pressing him more urgently. He is not being directed by thoughts of right and wrong but how to maintain his post as governor. So he tries a new tack - trying to arouse pity on the part of the priests. In fact, of course, he compromises himself more deeply. He brings Jesus out to them, weak and bloody from the scourging and humiliated by the robe and the crown of thorns (except, of course, John's report enhances the dignity of Jesus as the only one in total command of himself throughout the whole proceedings), and says that he is doing it so that his accusers might know that he finds no grounds for any charge against him. He condemns himself; if he publicly proclaims that he finds there is no basis for any charge how dare he inflict so terrible a punishment?

The words of Pilate have been variously translated, 'Behold the man', 'Here is the man', 'Here he is; the man'. No doubt what Pilate had in mind was, "You are afraid that this man is claiming to be your king - just look at the poor wretch now. Hasn't he been punished enough?" But in recording these words John understands that they mean so much more. Look at this man; the world has done its worst and has not moved him. Not only has he overcome the world, he is showing us how to do it. He has determined on the way of love and has shunned anger, bitterness, revenge and self pity; it is the way of obedience to his Father and his design as to how creation should work. If you want to know what man was created to be do not look at Adam, look at this man, Jesus.

6. Far from arousing pity, the sight of Jesus stirs the priests and leaders to greater passion and hatred, and they demand that he be crucified. Pilate is obviously exasperated at this and, losing patience with them tells them that if they want him crucified to do it themselves. In fact, of course, they are not permitted to do that. Pilate again states that he finds no charge for Jesus to answer.

7. Although they are forbidden to carry out the death penalty themselves the Jewish leaders shout back that they have a law under which Jesus has been sentenced to death. The Jews were so difficult that Rome permitted them to exercise their own customs, provided this did not conflict with Roman rule. At last the leaders are forced to reveal the true reason (see 18:30) for their hatred of Jesus - he has claimed to be the Son of God. Whatever claims Jesus had or had not made in the course of his teaching, when the high priest had asked him, before the Sanhedrin, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" he had replied "I am.," and as a consequence they had condemned him to death. (Mark 14:61-2 & 64)

8-10. Pilate's fear was not due to any religious scruples but superstition. Following on from the warning of his wife's dream, this statement from the Jews that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God got under Pilate's skin. Might he be offending one of the gods by having had Jesus scourged? So he goes back inside with Jesus and questions him further, "Where do you come from?"

What possible answer could Jesus give that would make any sense to Pilate? He had already spoken of the heavenly realm from which he came and of which he was, in a sense totally different from anything the world understood, the king; and Pilate had not been able to grasp anything other than a literal, temporal understanding.

It isn't so much that Jesus would not answer; he could not. Pilate, ever conscious of his authority and position, apparently interprets Jesus's silence as insolence and reminds him that his life or death depends on him. In the original there is a stress on the word 'me' - "is it to me you refuse to speak?"

11. Responding to Pilate's assertion of his authority Jesus reminds him that it does not lie in himself. In an immediate sense it is an authority invested upon him by Caesar, but Jesus goes behind Caesar to God himself - it is an authority from above. Over the centuries different rulers and regimes have feared the Church and sought to restrict its influence and even wipe it out altogether. However, the Church is no threat to Government (unless that Government is itself evil, and even then the Church cannot and must not promote anarchy) because God is a God of order and not chaos. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves." (Rom 13:1-2)

Authority is a strange thing; it is not the same as power (and Pilate speaks of authority - *exousia*, rather than power - *dunamis*). Tyrants have power but not authority because authority requires respect. Other people recognise that true authority upholds justice and right - values outside itself - and is not simply self seeking. Ultimately, therefore, all authority resides in and comes from God who set up the standards (in fact he is himself the standard) on which creation is founded; standards of love, goodness, righteousness and justice.

Jesus goes on to say that the one who handed him over to Pilate, that is the high priest as representative of the nation of Israel, is more guilty than Pilate and he links it to the previous statement with the word 'therefore'. It seems that his reasoning is this: Pilate had devolved authority to maintain order and justice; the fact that he blatantly did not do this in respect of Jesus (because he had him punished when he had declared him innocent) did not affect the fact that he did have the authority to govern. However, he did not understand the niceties of the Jewish religion. The high priest, however, did and he was responsible for maintaining the purity of the Jewish faith. Jesus perfectly embodied and fulfilled that faith and the high priest should have recognised that fact, but to do so would involve a drastic change in his influence and position (and that of his advisors and family) which he was unwilling to make, and he was wilfully blind to the truth of Jesus. Having no authority to put Jesus to death, he deliberately made use of the authority exercised by Pilate, in order to attain his ends. Although Pilate must have realised he was being manipulated he did not and could not appreciate the enormity of what was happening, whereas the high priest did or should have done.

12. Remember that Jesus had just endured the terrible ordeal of being flogged and was in such a state that Pilate had brought him out to the crowd to arouse their pity. Yet here he was, able to argue reasonably with the man who had the power of life and death over him. Pilate had never met anyone like this - totally unafraid of him, yet recognising his authority. More convinced than ever that Jesus represented no threat, Pilate sought to set him free. However, the Jews did threaten him at his weakest point. From their words there was the clear implication that if Pilate did release Jesus they would make sure that Caesar heard that he had failed to take action against a man who claimed to be a king.

13. Pilate knows that he has been cornered and he will have to yield to the Jews, but he still has one humiliation he can impose upon them. First, however, he goes through the formality of official judgement (until now he has dealt with Jesus on an unofficial level). He takes his place on the judgement seat. There is a suggestion that it should read that he placed Jesus on the judgement seat as a last mockery - were that so the mockery would rebound because the day will come when Jesus will sit on such a seat and judge the world. However, it is most unlikely that Pilate would do this, even to humiliate the Jews, in view of his attitude to Jesus revealed so far.

14. For a discussion about the day of the Passover meal see the introduction to chapter 13. Here it is necessary to understand that the day of preparation refers to the preparation for the Sabbath and not for the Passover; it was something that happened every week and the N.I.V translation brings out the fact that it was the day of Preparation of (or during) Passover Week. At the time of Jesus there were two methods of

measuring the time of day. Under the Jewish system the day began at 6 am and so the sixth hour would be noon. Under the Roman timing the day began at midnight and so the sixth hour would be 6 am. In view of the description of the various events there is little doubt John is using the latter system.

Having been outmanoeuvred by the Jews, Pilate deliberately baits them by referring to Jesus as their king. This infuriates them because the basis of their original complaint to Pilate was that he was making claims to be king.

15. In their fury they scream for his crucifixion. Baiting them further Pilate asks, "Shall I crucify your king?" Their anger causes the chief priests to go far beyond what they would wish to say when they were rational, "We have no king but Caesar." Pilate has wrung that confession out of them. No nation likes to be in subjection to another but to the Jews it was anathema; this is what made them so difficult to govern. But Pilate has brought them to this humiliation. In their determination to reject Jesus as king they are willing to admit to the right of Caesar to rule over them.

16. There are various Greek words which we translate as 'then'. The word used here implies a specific point of time - "it was at that stage," "that was the moment when;" NIV conveys this with the word 'finally.' Pilate had prevaricated as much as he could, but in the end he gave way to the demand of the Jewish leaders and by so doing unwittingly set the next stage of God's plan in operation.

17. Throughout his gospel John is not deeply interested in recording all the facts of Jesus's life as history; he selects those which serve his purpose of revealing the spiritual truths which lie behind, and are revealed by, those facts. He omits details of the procession from Pilate's judgement seat to Calvary which the other evangelists convey. He explains that from that time the soldiers took over and Jesus was forced to carry his own cross. In a sense Jesus had carried that cross from the moment he became aware that he was the Messiah.

Much has been written about the actual site of the crucifixion. No one today can be absolutely sure of the exact place, although we can be reasonably certain of the area where it would have happened. For some reason (also endlessly debated) it was called the place of the skull (Golgotha in Aramaic, Calvary in Greek).

18. On a practical level we might question how it was that there were two others crucified with Jesus. Crucifixions were not all that common. Had their execution already been fixed for that day or was it that as the priests had prevailed upon Pilate to have Jesus crucified and they wanted that done immediately, it was 'convenient' to carry out the sentence on the others at the same time? Of course, it was a fulfilment of the prophecy that he "was numbered with the transgressors."

19-22. When a criminal was taken through the streets on the way to crucifixion a notice was carried before him or hung from his neck proclaiming his crime. Perhaps it was this notice which was placed on the cross. Luke gives the gist of it - "This is the king of the Jews", but John sets it out in full, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." No doubt Pilate had deliberately worded it in that way, knowing it would infuriate the Jews with whom he had lost all patience because they had got the better of him (see note on v.13).

As a consequence of this feud between Pilate and the Jews the truth was proclaimed to all the world in that the notice was written not only in Aramaic but Latin and Greek also. Of course the Jews objected to the form of the wording and wanted it changed from a title to what it was supposed to be - a description of his crime, but Pilate refused to alter it.

23-24. The other gospels record that the soldiers cast lots for the clothes of Jesus but John gives two additional pieces of information. He says that there were four soldiers, and this was the usual number according to Roman custom; and he mentions the seamless robe. Although he does not spell it out (and it would not mean much to Gentiles who made up the majority of those for whom he was writing) almost certainly he was conveying a spiritual truth for those with eyes to see: - the high priest wore a seamless robe. John has already

revealed Jesus as King of a kingdom not of this world, here he sees him as fulfilling the role of the true high priest, bringing God to men and men to God.

John also points out that this casting lots for the garments is a fulfilment of prophecy contained in psalm 22. He leaves us with our own thoughts at the scene of the total indifference of the soldiers who gambled while their Creator died on a cross.

25. We cannot really imagine the feelings of Mary, Jesus' mother, watching her son be put to death and suffer that intense agony. The prophecy of Simeon "a sword will pierce your own soul," (Luke 2:35) was fulfilled. Her sister, Salome, was with her and also two other Mary's; Mary of Magdala and Mary the wife of Clopas. This latter Mary could be one involved in a later incident. Clopas is the Aramaic form of the Greek Cleopas. In Luke 24:13 ff. there is the story of two believers returning to Emmaus on the first Easter Day. Luke gives no description beyond "two of them" (13) and later that one of them was named Cleopas (18). It could well be that they were husband and wife and the wife was this Mary who was at the cross.

26-27. We need to remember that 'the disciple whom he loved' is John himself, so we are reading a very personal account here. Even in his extreme suffering Jesus thought of others and he is concerned for his mother watching that suffering. It seems very likely that Mary's sister was Salome and that she was the mother of Zebedee's children who were James and John himself; in which case Jesus and John were cousins. Elsewhere in the gospels reference is made to Jesus' brethren. Admittedly in the middle east and in Africa that term can include anyone who comes from the same village; however, the great majority of commentators (who do not start from the premise that Mary remained a virgin) believe that she and Joseph had other, natural children, one of whom was James, in which case it would have been their responsibility to care for their mother. However, at that time they did not believe in Jesus. In any case, it seems that they were not at the cross whereas John (apparently alone amongst the disciples) was. It seems that Jesus wanted to spare his mother the agony of witnessing his actual death and commits her to the care of John for both the immediate and long-term future. The literal translation says, 'from that hour' he took her into his home. The implication seems to be that he led Mary away from the cross to his house and, once she was settled, probably in the care of someone who was there, John returned to witness the end.

28. Between verses 27 and 28 some considerable time must have elapsed. The words of Jesus to his mother and to John would have been uttered fairly soon after he had been nailed to the cross; the last two utterances which John records were near the end. The great cry recorded by Matthew and Mark, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" marked the epitome of Jesus' suffering - he was cut off from his Father; God had cut himself in two. Jesus experienced the horror of being totally alone, separated from the Father he had known from the beginning. Of course, the completion of his actual physical death had to follow, but before that happened the relationship was restored; Jesus died in perfect peace and trust. The efficacy of the sacrifice of Jesus had nothing to do with the amount of physical pain he suffered nor the length of time that he was separated from his Father. Just as static electricity is released from a vehicle the moment a metallic strip touches the ground, so the fact that Jesus was separated from his Father while he bore our sin dealt with that sin.

With the victory won, Jesus could now think of himself and expressed his thirst. John comments that this fulfilled prophecies in Scripture recorded in Ps. 22:15 and 69:21. Surely this is something that he came to realise later. Jesus was truly thirsty, whether or not he knew at the time that he was fulfilling Scripture.

29. There was a jar of cheap wine nearby, no doubt for the soldiers. Someone dips a sponge into the wine. puts it on a stick and raises it to the lips of Jesus. He probably was not lifted as high as depicted in most paintings of the scene. There is a dispute about the stick. The stalk of the hyssop plant is not strong or long enough to bear any weight; however, the word translated 'hyssop' is hussopos and some commentators believe this is a corruption and that the word John used originally was hussos, which is a form of spear or javelin. Others refer to a species of marjoram which does have a stalk of sufficient length and strength. From a spiritual aspect what may be relevant is that on the night of the original Passover, the blood of the slaughtered

lamb was sprinkled or daubed on the door post using the leaves of the hyssop. If John did intend to make the association then it is in the words he uses rather than in the minds of the witnesses at the time. A sponge on a stick would surely not be immediately linked to the hyssop used at the Passover.

30. It is important to appreciate that Jesus said “It is finished,” and not “I am finished”. The three other gospels record that Jesus cried out loudly and Luke records that the words were, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit,” they do not mention the words which John records. We probably need to put the two cries together. Having moistened his parched tongue, Jesus was able to give a shout of triumph, “I’ve done it, I’ve completed it.” Then he commits his spirit to his Father as he dies. John does not record the actual words but he describes a deliberate act on the part of Christ in that he bowed his head. The word translated ‘bowed’ implies a deliberate placing, as we might place our head upon a pillow. His head did not fall forward as he died, he put it in a position of rest and then he yielded to death. He was in control all the time.

31. The day of Preparation does not refer to the Passover but to the Sabbath although, because of the feast, it was a special Sabbath. It was the Roman normal custom to leave a person on the cross until he died - possibly taking many hours, sometimes more than a day. However Jewish law was more merciful:-

If a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. [Deut. 21:22-3]

No doubt the Jewish authorities were not concerned about mercy, but they were sticklers for the law (unless, as in the case of Jesus, it prevented them from doing as they wished), and so they approached Pilate yet again, asking him to have the legs of the three broken. This was the recognised method of ending the life of the crucified quickly should it be necessary. It was done with a hammer or mallet. Some commentators state that the shock of this was sufficient to end the life of those already weakened. Others point out that crucifixion caused difficulty in breathing as the weight of the body put pressure on the lungs; this was relieved by the victim raising himself by pushing on the nail through the feet. Breaking the legs would make this impossible and thus hasten death.

32-34. Apparently Pilate granted their request (he had not wanted to condemn Jesus in the first place) and the soldiers stepped forward to break the legs of all three. However, when they approached Jesus they discovered that he was already dead and did not break his legs. However, probably to make absolutely sure, one of them thrusts his spear into the side of Jesus. The other gospels do not refer to these two incidents but John makes much of them, especially the fact that from the wound of the spear both water and blood flowed out. This is unusual. With the heart still, a dead body normally does not bleed and normally there would be no separate serum or water. It has been suggested that although it is rare for the heart to rupture, it can happen and following the extreme suffering undergone by Jesus, in his case it did. Apparently this could cause blood and serum to separate in a sac in or near the pericardium. The spear penetrated this and the blood and water were released. John is not interested in how this happened but attaches significance to it. Almost certainly over the years he has come to believe that this is symbolic of the water of baptism and the blood of the New Covenant epitomised in the Eucharist. This is the life of God given for and to the world.

35. If John wrote down this gospel personally then here he is seeking not to intrude. It is similar to the reference to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23, 21:20) being John himself. Alternatively, if someone else was recording John’s teaching then here he is speaking of John himself. In either case the intention is to establish the truth of the matter. John saw what happened with his own eyes: Jesus was not in a swoon, he was dead, and water and blood came from the wound in his side.

36. Thinking back on these events, John realises that the injunction in Scripture that the bones of the Passover lamb should not be broken (Ex. 12:46, Num. 9:12) was perfectly fulfilled in relation to the true sacrificial lamb - Jesus. (Psalm 34:20 also states that God will not allow the bones of a righteous man to be broken. In this context, however, the reference to the Passover lamb is far more apposite.)

37. Another prophecy is also fulfilled - "They will look on me, the one they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). This speaks of the spirit of grace and supplication which one day God will pour out on the house of David and on Jerusalem but which will also occasion grief and mourning.

38-42. We can none of us be sure how we will act under pressure. We hope we will acquit ourselves well but, until we are actually in a position where a decision is required, we cannot know. Joseph of Arimathea was a good man but it has been said that all that is needed for evil to flourish is for good men to do nothing. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, and respected (Mark 15:43), but he had not consented to their decision and action regarding Jesus (Luke 23:51). Had he not been present when the decision was made? and, if this were so, had he deliberately stayed away or had he not been called so early in the morning? Nicodemus was also a secret disciple; he had come to Jesus by night and there is no record of him speaking out in public on his behalf. Peer pressure was too great. However, the death of Jesus had an effect which his life had not produced. They are both now willing to be associated with him. Joseph actually goes to Pilate to ask for the body. Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus had died so soon (Mark 15:44) and checked with the centurion, but then consented to Joseph's request.

Joseph provided his own new tomb (Matt. 27:60) hewn out of rock in a garden. (As Jesus occupied it for so brief a time, presumably it was later used for Joseph himself as he had originally intended.) He also provided the linen while Nicodemus supplied the spices - a very great amount. Egyptians embalmed the dead body but that was not the Jewish custom. Although it was done hurriedly because the Sabbath was upon them when they could not work, it seems that it was done carefully. Fortunately the tomb was near the site of the crucifixion and no time was lost in having to carry the body any distance.

## Chapter 20

1-2. The different gospels give different accounts of exactly what happened on that first Easter morning. How many women went to the tomb and at what time? How many angels were there and were they in or outside the tomb? Probably there was a great deal of activity on the part of the small band of followers and had we been there or were we able to question the eyewitnesses everything would fall into place. For instance, John concentrates on Mary Magdalene and at first sight, according to him, it seems she went to the tomb alone. However, in v. 2 he records that she said, "We don't know where they have put him," clearly implying that at least one other person was with her.

John also says that it was still dark when she set out. Whilst not denying the literal truth of that statement, this gospel does make so much of the symbolism of light and dark as depicting good and evil (e.g. "Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you", [12:35]) and proclaiming Jesus to be the light of the world, that John may well have in mind that, believing Jesus to be dead and unaware of the resurrection, Mary set off in spiritual as well as literal darkness. The heavy stone which had been rolled across the opening of the tomb and sealed (Matt 27:66) had been not simply rolled back but, apparently, lifted out of its runner and laid flat; for an angel was sitting on it (Matt 28:2) and he would hardly perch awkwardly on its rim. The sitting of it is a delightful touch, demonstrating the victory. Of course, the tomb was open not in order to let the body of Jesus out (he could materialise in a room where the door was locked [v.19]) but to allow the believers to look in, which is what Mary did (although John does not specifically mention that) because she was able to report that the body was no longer in the tomb. She immediately assumes, reasonably, that other people (presumably those who had had him crucified) had taken possession of it. So she runs back to Peter and John (the words imply that they were not necessarily together at the time) to tell them. It is interesting that in spite of his failure in denying his Lord, she still regarded Peter as the leader of the band of disciples.

3-9. Although he describes events in the third person, John is writing about himself going to the tomb with Peter. He was the faster runner and arrives there first. He looks in but does not enter. Peter, whose nature is to act first and think later, goes in. This encourages John to join him.

In the description of what happened there John uses three different words which the A.V. translates with the verb 'to see'. "And he stooping down... saw the linen clothes lying (5)." "Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes... (6)." "Then went in also that other disciple... and he saw (8)." The first of these is *blepo* which refers simply to the physical act of looking, probably a single glance. The second word, which occurs in v.6, is *theoreo* and this implies careful perusal. (Incidentally it is the word used in 8:51 where Jesus says that the person who keeps his word will not see or particularly notice death.) Peter notices that the cloth round the head, which would have been separate from the linen strips wrapped round the body, was still separate from them and was folded, not cast aside. The implication is that the body of Jesus dematerialised leaving the grave clothes completely untouched, collapsed upon themselves, although probably lumpy with the great amount of spices which had been used (19:39). Had someone stolen the body there would have been no reason to remove the grave clothes and certainly not to fold them carefully.

The third word is *eido* which implies not only physical sight but also mental comprehension. Peter had noticed that although the body was no longer present the grave clothes had not been disturbed; John not only noticed that but drew from it the implication and he believed. Just what did he believe? Surely that the body of Jesus had come to life again. He had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from death, now he himself had risen. But there was a difference, Lazarus had risen still in his grave clothes which needed to be removed by others (11:44). No doubt the truth strengthened John's belief, which may well have been shaken by his death on the cross, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. By writing as he has in v.9 it seems that John wants to convey the fact that at this stage his faith was the result of what he actually observed; it was not reasoned out from Scripture, nor did he fully appreciate its significance. His belief was prompted solely by the facts

10-12. Having given her news to the two disciples, Mary returned to the tomb but, of course, they had run on ahead. After a while the two men must have realised that there was nothing they could do there and they went

back to their homes. Although there was nothing that she could do either, Mary was reluctant to leave and stayed there crying. John's record is so true to life; although she knows already that the tomb is empty she looks in again, just as, when we lose something, we may search again in a place we know we have already searched thoroughly. This time she sees two angels seated one at the head and one at the feet of the place where the body of Jesus had been placed. This raises so many questions. Why were they not seen before by Mary at the first? and then by Peter and John? Had the angels only just arrived or were they there all the time but only now had been made visible and, if the latter, why? Then, again, the different gospels give differing accounts. Matthew reports that there was one angel, outside the tomb, and he was seen by the guards and then by the women to whom he spoke. According to Mark there was one 'young man' who was inside the tomb to the right. Luke states that the women entered the tomb and then two 'men' in dazzling clothes suddenly appeared and stood beside them. All that can be said is that the gospel writers were not preparing a statement for a court of law but were reporting the account given by different witnesses. Were we able to interview them, no doubt the apparent discrepancies would be cleared up easily. As it is, those very discrepancies add veracity to the reports; there is no attempt at collusion to make the accounts agree, but the basic facts are confirmed. The body of Jesus was not in the tomb, and there were angels who gave a message of great joy. Angels were involved at the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus and angels were involved at its end.

13. If we take the question at its face value, it means that the angels were genuinely surprised that Mary should be crying. The greatest victory in the history of mankind had been accomplished yet here was a member of the human race in tears at the very place where it had happened. So why was she crying?

Did Mary have anyone particular in mind in using the term 'they'? the Jewish authorities? the Roman soldiers? Whoever it was, what they had done was to take away her Lord. Jesus had become the goal, the purpose of her life; life, true life, was to live for him and so he had become her Lord. They had taken him away from her by killing him, now they had not even left her his body as a centre for her devotion.

14. Although it is not a significant issue, it is interesting that Mary turned away from the angels at that point. There was no one else around and they were the ones who had asked the question. These were angels, yet Mary behaves in their presence in a strangely offhand way. Did Jesus make some sound or did the angels respond in some way to his presence which caused her to turn ?

Some commentators explain away the fact that Mary did not recognise Jesus by saying that she had been looking into a darkened tomb and turning to look at him her eyes had not adjusted to the brighter light outside and so she could not see his features. But, surely, that is to miss a point of significance. Mary was not the only one not to recognise Jesus after his resurrection. The disciples fishing in the Sea of Tiberias (21:1-7) - and John does not make out that distance was the problem; Jesus was near enough to hail them (see also the note on 21:12). On another occasion, Matthew states that whilst some of the disciples recognised the risen Lord and worshipped him, others doubted (Matt. 28:17) and, most unusual of all, the two on the road to Emmaus walked and talked with Jesus for some considerable time and did not recognise him (Luke 24:13-32). There is something here peculiar to the risen body of Jesus which should not be taken as a pattern for us in our own death and resurrection, because there is no reason for us to delay going to be with the Lord. It was important for the understanding and faith of his disciples, and all who from henceforth were to believe through their testimony, that Jesus should not simply disappear. The empty tomb was a miraculous sign, but fallen humanity needs more than the negative (there was no body); it requires the positive as revealed in vv. 19-20. It seems that the body of Jesus was in an interim state; it was no longer totally confined to the limitations common to us all which it had before his death (it could materialise and dematerialise at his will) but nor was it yet fully transformed into the spiritual body perfectly suited to heaven. During the period between his rising from the dead and his ascension he is recognised not so much by how he looked as by what he said and did. To take it a stage further, not by his appearance but by his personality. Perhaps this has a truth for us. How will we recognise each other in the life to come? My grandmother died when I was seven and knew me only as a little boy, my own grandchildren know me only as an old man. If recognition is to depend upon physical appearance that creates a problem. Although there is so much we do not know about that life, we believe that we shall continue as full personalities and not be absorbed into some nirvana. Indeed, we shall each be fully what we

have been created to be and that will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29 and 1 John 3:2), and we will be able to express ourselves through spiritual bodies which are perfectly suited to the life of heaven (2 Cor. 5:1-5). But it seems that we shall recognise each other by who we are rather than our current physical features. We need to broaden our understanding and certainly our imagination; heaven is much more than a duplicate of this world in glorious Technicolor.

15. Jesus asks Mary the same question as the angels (13), "Woman, why are you crying?" but adds, "Who is it you are looking for?" Of course, he already knows but this is to lead her on to understand the truth.

Mary assumes that this man whom she does not recognise must be the gardener: perhaps he is responsible for moving the body of Jesus. So she asks where he has put him. In her grief she does not specify who it is she is speaking about, assuming he will know. Of course, Mary would need help in collecting the body once she knows where it is; there is no need to accuse her of not thinking the matter through. She is simply speaking out her disjointed thoughts.

16. Jesus speaks her name. All that has been said above about people not recognising Jesus by his appearance, can be applied to his voice. His instructions to the disciples in the boat to cast the net on the other side, the long explanation to the two on the road to Emmaus and the questions to Mary in v. 15, in no case did they recognise his voice. However, he was revealed in the deeply personal use of her name. Perhaps a further indication that in heaven we will recognise each other in relationship and by who we are.

Having turned from peering into the tomb to look at Jesus, Mary must have turned back again to look into the tomb and, presumably, at the angels, because John states that at the sound of her name she 'turned towards him'. In her relief and joy she cries out 'Rabboni' which is the Aramaic form of 'Rabbi', meaning teacher of master.

17. Mary moves to embrace him, perhaps she actually does so, but Jesus tells her not to touch (A.V.) or hold onto him. This is interesting because in Luke 24:39 Jesus invites the disciples to touch him as proof that it really is himself standing before them. However, the original words are different. Here in John the word he uses carries the meaning 'to fasten' whereas in Luke the word means 'to feel'. The implication seems to be (and no doubt John seeks deliberately to teach this) that Mary would be wrong in seeking to restore the previous relationship as it was, seeking to hold Jesus to this life. As a reason for this injunction, Jesus states that he has not yet ascended to the Father - almost as though it will be (or would have been) all right had he already done so. Whilst literally that may be impossible, what John seems to be conveying is that Jesus is in an interim state (see note on v.14); his body is not as it was during his earthly ministry, yet he is not yet as he will be when he has sat down at the Father's side. When he is there Mary can enter into a new, deeper and more effective relationship with Jesus. Hitherto, she could only be with him when she was in his physical presence, in future he will be in her (14:20). This truth is explained to Mary so that we may all understand our own relationship with Jesus.

So, instead of holding Jesus to herself, he commissions her to go and tell his disciples that he is returning to the Father. In fact, he refers to his 'brothers'; the disciples are related to him in a new way. We, who have entered into the kingdom, inherit all that Jesus has; by opening heaven to all believers he has become the first of many brothers (Romans 8:29) and that must be understood in today's culture as embracing sisters also. However, Jesus is careful to make a distinction - "my Father and your Father, my God and your God." He is the only begotten Son and has a unique relationship with his Father. Nowhere does Jesus use the term 'our' Father in relation to himself and human beings. (The phrase "Our Father in heaven" in what we call 'The Lord's Prayer', is teaching the disciples their corporate relationship to each other, he is not linking himself with them in that instance.)

18. According to other gospels the angel(s) told the women to give the disciples the message that Jesus had risen and gone before them into Galilee and would meet them there. John records that the Lord gave Mary a different message related not to a place on earth but to heaven. But Mary is able to do much more than relay a

message about the Lord, more even than a message from the Lord, she says, "I have seen the Lord!" This is the secret of all true evangelism. It is not enough to know about the Lord; we must know him for ourselves.

19. Apparently, if we are to follow the original message of the angel(s) recorded by Matthew and Mark, Jesus did not intend to reveal himself in his resurrection body to the disciples that first Easter day, they would have to return to Galilee. From the message given to Mary we may wonder whether he intended to reveal himself to them at all - he was returning straight to his Father. Scripture clearly records a change of plan. To say that, opens a whole realm of speculation. Because God is the eternal he is, himself, outside time although space/time is his creation and, in Christ, he entered fully within its limitations. Thus, nothing is beyond his understanding; if he did change his plan then he was aware (strictly, speaking of non-time, it should be is aware) all along that he would change his mind and so any such change took place together with the original plan. However, to us operating within time, God's plan is experienced as a series of events. Here, Jesus had not yet ascended to the eternal spiritual realm and so he was, at least to some extent, still subject to time/space limitation. (Although Jesus could appear and disappear at will and in different places, there is no indication that in his resurrection body he appeared in two places at the same time.) Jesus had told the disciples he was about to leave them but that he would return (13:33, 14:3, 16:17-24). Presumably, in the spiritual realm, the statement is sufficient; what God proclaims he fulfils. However, humanity, even when it is redeemed, requires proof. The testimony of the angel(s) at the tomb is not enough. Mary's distress draws forth the compassion of Jesus and he appears to her. Similarly with the two on the road to Emmaus. Following this, the plan to meet with the disciples in Galilee has to be amended, they are too distraught and fearful.

So it was that on the evening of that same day (and John stresses that fact, possibly because in Jewish reckoning evening heralds the start of what, to us, is the next day), the day of the resurrection, that Jesus appears to them. The disciples were gathered behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews. The fact that the body was missing created problems for the Jewish authorities and it was all too possible that they would blame the followers of Jesus for being involved in this disappearance - indeed, later they concocted this very story (Matt. 28:12/14).

John says that Jesus came and stood among them. Where did he come from? Where was he when he was not appearing to believers? We know he had not yet ascended to heaven. It is an interesting question but we do not need to know the answer. Even if in our present limited understanding we were able grasp its truth; it would not help us in our living this life, and so no explanation is given. Our upbringing, with its emphasis on rational argument, may lead us to assume that Jesus came through the locked doors or the walls, but that is not what Scripture implies. He did not come through anything. Apparently he was able to materialise at any place of his choosing and then dematerialise; he was not just spirit, his body was physically there - he could be touched and he could eat (Luke 24:42).

The disciples must have been in turmoil; fear and hope mingling together and so the word, "Peace be with you," is very meaningful. In fact, it is the normal everyday greeting used at the time and often today in that area - much as we say "good day". Nevertheless John remembers that Jesus repeated that greeting a few moments later (22) and surely he must have in mind the new meaning Jesus gave to the words (14:27). By his death and resurrection Jesus had won a new peace: the worst that life can do to us had been flung at him and he had come through it (not avoided it) victorious. He has provided a certain hope which is an anchor for our souls (Heb. 6:19) bringing peace in the storms of life.

20. Luke describes this scene in a little more detail, stating that Jesus invited his disciples to touch him and that he ate some fish in their presence. John is content to state simply that Jesus showed them his hands and side. This is indeed their beloved Master in person, not a ghost, not an hallucination; his body has been transformed but the body that has been transformed is the one which was crucified. At last they believe. No doubt their joy at seeing him again was sufficient for the moment and the full implication did not dawn on them until later. Death is still an enemy, it is unrealistic and insensitive to those who mourn to pretend anything else, but it is a defeated enemy.

21-22. Jesus repeats the greeting which surely implies that he desires actually to impart the peace of which it speaks and then goes on to commission the disciples for service. The work he has begun of bringing in the kingdom of God is to go on (see note on 14:12 ff.). In the same way that the Father sent him into the world with a human body to be the vessel to fulfil his will (Heb. 10:5-57), so he now sends them to be a continuation, as it were, of that same body to fulfil that same will. And just as Jesus had no power intrinsic to himself but rather that it was the Father living in him through the Holy Spirit who was doing his work (14:10) so it will be the Father working through them. But they also need the same Holy Spirit to be in them.

Jesus breathes on them with the words, "Receive Holy Spirit." There can be little doubt that just as John opens his Gospel with a clear imitation of the opening of Genesis, so here he has in mind the description of God breathing into man his own breath of Life (Gen. 2:7). In both the Old and New Testaments one word can be translated as breath, spirit or wind (*ruach* in the Old Testament and *pneuma* in the New). The question arises did anything actually happen when Jesus spoke these words that evening of the first Easter Day? If so, what was it? and was anything additional given at Pentecost? Some commentators get round the problem by saying that the statement on Easter Day was promissory, nothing happened at the time; the fulfilment was at Pentecost. However, there is another possible explanation.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and later, at his baptism, he was filled with the Holy Spirit (see note on 1:32 ff.). We human beings also need to be born of the Spirit (in our case, seeing we have already been given existence by being born naturally [of the flesh], it is a matter of being born again of the Spirit), but to receive power for service we need also to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:8). Note: now that the Holy Spirit has been poured out (at Pentecost) there is no need for delay; we can and should be filled with the Spirit at the same time as being born of the Spirit; however they are distinct events, as they were in the life of Jesus. Then again, when mankind was created, God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living being, but it was intended that he should experience a second event which was to give him eternal life - symbolised by eating of the tree of life. Until then he would not live for ever (Gen. 3:22). Scripture is consistent, therefore; life to the full, eternal life with power for service, is a two-stage process: the person is brought to life by the work of the Holy Spirit and is given power by being filled with the Spirit. In the light of this, may it not be that the life given to the corporate body of Christ, the Church, was also a two-stage process? Easter Day and not Pentecost was the true birthday of the Church when Jesus breathed out his Spirit upon the disciples (although the words 'on them' are not in the best texts). This act of creation brought the Church into being and in so doing bestowed authority - just as man had authority over the earth and the animal kingdom even before he had eaten of the tree of life (Gen. 2:19-20). However, the power of the Spirit for service was not given until Pentecost (Acts 1:8). This explanation agrees with the texts of Scripture and allows that something real did happen when Jesus breathed on the disciples that evening of Easter Day and also that something additional happened on the day of Pentecost.

23. It is important to understand that the disciples (and this includes the Church of which they were its first and founding members) were given authority to declare the forgiveness of sins, not to forgive. Only the person sinned against can forgive ("Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Luke 5:21). Also, only those who truly repent can receive forgiveness. The implication is that the Holy Spirit will give discernment so that the disciples may know whether or not the repentance is genuine. Ideally, perhaps, every believer should be convinced for him or herself of the forgiveness of their sins. However, there are occasions when we feel we have failed so deeply that we need to hear the words spoken aloud, "You are forgiven." Jesus knows that and no denomination, or group within a denomination, should deprive any believer of something which their Lord has so specifically provided. Some denominations restrict the declaration of the absolution of sins to specified priests or elders and it may indeed be wise to ensure that such a serious and important role is given to men and women of spiritual maturity, especially if this commission of Jesus is to be observed in full. The duty is to declare not only the forgiveness of sins but the non-forgiveness also. It is an awesome responsibility!

24-25. From the descriptions we have of him in Scripture, Thomas was a realist, possibly leaning towards depression. He was also extremely loyal. When Jesus determined to return to Jerusalem and its environs,

Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." It was he also who pointed out to Jesus, who had said that he was going to leave the disciples but that they knew the way to where he was going, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" As is often the case with depressives, it seems that he withdrew to suffer alone, and so he missed out on the experience of the others in meeting with the risen Lord. The Lord deals with each of us in a personal way. Mary's particular distress drew forth the compassion of the Lord and he appeared to her personally (See note on 20:19). Whilst all the disciples were deeply affected by the Lord's death, for Peter it must have been particularly unbearable; he had denied he had ever known him - and done that three times! He was a failure and there would never be an opportunity either to put it right or to say sorry. He may well have contemplated suicide, his sense of inadequacy must have been so intense; so the Lord appears to him personally also (Luke 24:34) although we may only guess at what, if anything, was said between them. The two on the road to Emmaus seem to have been particularly troubled by their understanding of who and what the prophesied Messiah was to be, and so to them Jesus appears in order to expound the Scriptures.

So the other disciples tell Thomas about Jesus appearing to them. However, he is too honest to pretend to a faith that is unreal. That is not to say that the faith of others is unimportant in conveying the truth to others; indeed, it is essential for how else can we hear of the Lord and see him at work except in their lives? But we cannot exist on a second-hand faith, it must become real for us. Surely Thomas is not acting as a rebel, no doubt he would have longed to believe the testimony of the others and perhaps that caused him to overstate the proof he requires, but he is passionate in his pursuit of a living faith. Doubt can push us to deeper faith and deeper understanding of that faith than blind unquestioning acceptance of what others tell us, even though their words may be the spur that drives us to seek the truth for ourselves. So Thomas stipulates that he must see and even touch the wounds of Jesus for himself before he will believe this astonishing claim that he is alive.

26-29. A week later Thomas has joined the band again and is with them, presumably in the same house where Jesus had appeared to them. Once again the doors were locked and Jesus appears with the same greeting - "Peace be with you." Then Jesus, addressing Thomas, echoes exactly the stipulations that disciple had laid down. "Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." We cannot know whether Thomas actually did so; for myself I doubt it. Far more than such physical proof, what must have affected him so deeply was the fact that although Jesus had not been visibly present when he had so vehemently expressed his feelings to the others, he was aware of exactly what he had said. To see and touch the wounds was to confine Jesus to a physical presence; whereas for Jesus to repeat the exact words Thomas had used revealed the greater truth and wonder which Jesus was to declare immediately before his ascension, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:20)

The response of Thomas is very similar to that of Nathanael (1:49) when Jesus told him that he 'saw' him sitting under the fig tree before Philip called him, except that Thomas goes much further than Nathaniel could possibly have understood at that time; he says, "My Lord, and my God!" Jesus is not simply the Messiah - the expected anointed one - nor is he only the Son of God, although that is true; for Thomas Jesus is the God who claims his total allegiance. Whatever faith Thomas may have had in the unseen Yaweh of the Jews is now focused on this Jesus with whom he has walked and talked for some three years, whom he saw crucified, dead and buried, and who now stands before him clearly revealing that he was totally aware of words which Thomas had spoken privately to the other disciples. This must be all that we mean by the term 'God' and the only response is to offer all that we mean by 'me'.

Jesus told him to stop being a doubter and become a believer. Although our faith is not unreasonable, it is not attained by reason. We speak of 'a leap of faith', and such it is. As we make it, we cannot know that there is anything there for us to land on but there is no other way of discovery and, making it, we find it to be true.

By saying that Thomas believes because he has seen and blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe, it is not necessary to adopt the view that Jesus is speaking of some sort of spiritual exam as though Thomas gets a pass mark but those who believe without seeing get a distinction. He is laying down a principle; finally faith rests on an internal, spiritual reception and recognition of truth. Yet it is not a matter of being able to believe a certain number of impossible things before breakfast, as the red queen told Alice. We do not have to commit

mental hara-kiri in order to believe. It is reason that may take us so far, but eventually we have to make that leap of faith and we discover an additional dimension to ourselves alongside our intellect. We know, and we know we know. To the individual who experiences that knowing it is as valid as a carefully reasoned theorem, but we cannot explain it to another using reason alone. If that knowing is, in fact, a deception, then I am less than a person, I am nothing, and life is indeed a tale told by an idiot and nothing anywhere has any significance. But I do not accept that; my experience is real, a meaningful part of eternity, and that is faith.

30-31. John has reached the climax of his gospel in v.28. Thomas has spoken the words which John desires should be on the lips of every human being and this is the purpose of his writing as he has. He has not attempted to set out a biography of the life of Jesus, covering every detail of his life; in fact he has been highly selective, including only seven miracles and those he has chosen are not there for themselves but because they point to a greater truth about life and about Jesus, so he calls them 'signs'. Indeed, we can learn also from the omission of what the synoptists regard as key events - John has no birth narrative, nor any reference to the transfiguration, institution of the Holy Communion nor the agony in the garden.

So, he acknowledges this by stating that Jesus did so much more than he has included, but that his purpose has been not to amaze or entertain his readers but to demand a response. We must give an explanation of this man Jesus whom John has set before us. How was he able not only to perform miracles, but to behave as no other human being has behaved in respect of the control of his own life, not as a disciplined stoic but as a warm, compassionate and deeply feeling man? Who was he? How did he know so much about what life was for, how to live it and what God requires? John longs that his readers should come to the same conclusion as Thomas, this man must be God incarnate and demands our total allegiance - which is what is involved in 'believing' as John uses the word. As that belief is worked out in our lives, so those lives will be renewed and transformed. Yes, it is life which is eternal, but it begins now because, through Jesus, we have entered the eternal reality, the kingdom of God.

## Chapter 21

The final verse of the previous chapter clearly shows that that was the planned conclusion of John's Gospel, why then do we have this chapter? Down the years commentators have made a number of suggestions - some rather far-fetched. It may be that Peter's denial of the Lord caused some to reject his (Peter's) ministry and this chapter records his re-commissioning by the Lord himself. It also illustrates that the risen Jesus was not confined to appearing only in Jerusalem, and refutes the rumour which had spread about that John would not die and sets out what Jesus actually said to him in this regard. It makes a point of reiterating the statement of 20:30 that there were many things which Jesus did which are not recorded in this Gospel; perhaps some believers were questioning why important events recorded by the other evangelists were not included here - did that imply that the writer was unaware of them and therefore was not a reliable witness? We cannot know for certain why this section was added but rejoice that we have it.

Who wrote it? was it the same person who wrote the rest of this Gospel? Not if it were John himself because verse 24 reveals that someone else is testifying to John's reliability, but if John is writing through an amanuensis such as John the Elder, then it may well be the same person.

1. Typically, in his description of the resurrection appearances, John does not report details of any place on earth where Jesus says he will meet with his disciples but he concentrates on the eternal spiritual aspects - "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:18). However, Matthew and Mark record that the angel at the tomb told the women to instruct the disciples that Jesus was going before them to Galilee and they would see him there. So this chapter opens with John recounting how Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee.

Seven of the eleven were together when Peter, ever the man of action and probably bored with waiting, decides that he will return to his trade and announces "I'm going fishing." That does not imply he contemplates a full-time occupation, simply that it is something he feels like doing then. The others respond and say, "We'll come too." Did Peter still have his own boat or did they use one of Zebedee's? (Mark 1:19-20). They get in the boat and spend the night fishing but catch nothing.

4-6. In the early morning, probably shortly after daybreak, the disciples see someone on the shore. It was Jesus but the disciples didn't perceive this. He calls out to them, asking if they have caught anything; the terms he uses are interesting. *Paidion* literally means 'little children'. NIV, with others, has 'friends'. Commentators suggest 'Lads,' as a term of endearment. That is to say, although the disciples do not recognise the stranger on the shore, he speaks in terms of familiarity. He asks if they have any 'meat' - a general term meaning have they caught anything eat? When they say, 'no', he tells them to throw out their net on the right side of the boat and they will find some. Apparently it often happens that someone on the shore can see a shoal of fish more clearly than those actually on the water and so they follow his advice and make a catch so large that they cannot haul the net aboard. It may well be that once again John is using an actual event to convey a spiritual truth. In future the Church in the world will be about the business of catching men, of bring people into the kingdom; but Christ has not left us to our own abilities, he is still directing his Church from the perspective of heaven and we need to seek guidance from him if we are to succeed.

7. As so often in this Gospel, it is John who is the first to perceive and Peter the first to act. From the way the story is told, it isn't that John recognises Jesus physically, it is the effect of his actions, his instructions. Probably he recalls a previous occasion at the beginning of their ministry when there was a great catch of fish after they had been out all night and caught nothing (Luke 5:1-11). As a fisherman at work, Peter would be stripped to a loin cloth and so, pausing only to grab his outer garment, he jumps into the water and wades ashore.

8. The others follow, but take care of the practicalities; they tow the net full of fish to the shore. John mentions that the distance involved was about 90 metres, which tends to confirm that this is an eyewitness account.

9. This verse of simple description carries details of significance. In chapter 18 v.18 John has recorded that it was while he was standing warming himself at a charcoal fire that Peter denied three times that he knew the Lord. A little later in this story he will record Peter's restoration - affirming three times his love for the Lord; again, the setting is a charcoal fire. Is it reading too much into the text to see the symbolism here? When we sin, it isn't enough to say a simple 'sorry'; we need to go to the heart of our failure, to face it head on and appreciate the depth of wrong we have committed and hurt we have caused.

Then there is the interesting point John makes that not only had Jesus made a fire (presumably he could easily have gathered some wood from the shore line) but he had provided fish and bread. It is pointless asking where or how he had obtained this - he could hardly have purchased it. Is there a reference here to a previous occasion when Jesus worked the great miracle of feeding 5,000 on bread and fish (John 6:9)? Almost certainly the details of this story are included to refute any suggestion (which, by the time this chapter was written, may have developed) that the risen Jesus was only a spirit or ghost.

10. Some commentators claim that there was no need for the disciples to bring fish from their recent catch because Jesus could have multiplied the bread and fish he already had to provide enough food for them all; but that seems to fly in the face of the evidence - why else would Jesus ask them to bring some more fish? (but see note on v. 13 below) Perhaps there is a lesson here, the work of the Lord on earth is one of co-operation involving his resources and ours (although ours are also given by him, just as the great catch here had been at the instruction of the Lord).

11. Once again, in his delight at seeing the Lord and in eagerness to serve him, it is Peter who clammers on board the boat to release the knot with which the net had been tied for the towing (6 & 8) and drags it ashore. Many ingenious suggestions have been put forward as to the significance of the number of fish -153. In fact there is probably no spiritual significance at all; it is just that it was such a large catch that when the count was made the number stayed in the minds of those who were there. Similarly with the reference to the fact that the net was not torn, some have sought to read into this symbolism such as the fact that none of those given to Jesus by the Father will be lost (6:39) or they have seen the net as a symbol of the Church which is comprehensive enough to embrace men and women of all nations and walks of life if they are 'caught' by Jesus. Perhaps that is so but it may be no more than to stress the astonishingly large size of the catch.

12. John sets the naturalness of the scene. Here is a man the disciples watched die and whom, they know, was placed in a tomb, standing before them and inviting them to come and eat breakfast. However, the next phrase is interesting. Why does John state that none of the disciples dared to ask Jesus who he was? The word 'dared' here means ventured, or was bold enough, or could bring himself to. Why should they need to do so? If we meet someone we know we do not ask them who he or she is; so why does John make such a point of this? It seems that there was something different about the risen Lord from what he had been when they walked and talked with him during his earthly ministry, and yet they had no doubt that it was Jesus. (See full note on 20:14)

13. We cannot be sure exactly what happened. Had the disciples brought a few of the fish as Jesus had requested (10) which had had time to cook while the catch as a whole was brought ashore and counted? or did Jesus already have enough fish to feed all of them? Certainly the way the account is written is very reminiscent of the description of the feeding of the 5,000. John might easily have stated simply, "so they had breakfast" or even left us to assume that they did. Instead, he seems to make a point of Jesus taking first the fish and then the bread and distributing it to each of them.

14. We can take this statement in two ways. To the disciples as a whole he had appeared first on the evening of the day of his resurrection and secondly a week later when Thomas was with them., so this is the third time. Or we can take all the appearances on the day of resurrection - to Mary, to Peter, to the two on the road to Emmaus and to the disciples together, as a whole and see that as one appearance, and that of a week later as the second, making this the third.

15-19. Here we have a passage of intricate pattern. There is a play on three words which are interwoven like a plait of three strands. The three words are love, sheep/lambs and feed/tend. There is a problem because the conversation between Jesus and Peter would have been conducted in Aramaic but is reported in this Gospel in Greek and we cannot be sure that the nuances in the latter were present in the former. However, because those nuances are present in the Greek we can assume that the writer intended his readers to notice and learn from them.

First, regarding the word 'love'. There are two words in the original, *agapao* and *phileo*. Some commentators claim that the difference between them is so slight that no significance should be attached to their alternation. However, the use of each is so carefully placed that it does not do the author justice to ignore it. *Agapao* is the word that Jesus made his own; it refers to a love which is not drawn from the lover by some attribute in another but depends upon the will and character of the lover ('while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,' Rom. 5:7); whereas *phileo* refers to affection and deep friendship.

Before we turn to the text we should remember that Peter had denied he knew Jesus three times and so Jesus gives him three opportunities to declare his love for him. We have already commented on the fact that the denials took place by a charcoal fire and the affirmation of love was in the same setting. It is after breakfast that Jesus takes Peter aside and walks with him along the shore (see v.20); the relationship between them has already been restored (Luke 24:34) and would have been strengthened by the fellowship of the meal, so it is in that context that Jesus leads Peter back to his failure; it has to be faced, but within the security of the knowledge that he will not be rejected.

Jesus begins by calling him 'Simon Bar-Jonah' - son of John. That probably hurt Peter; it takes him back to the person he was, and still is at heart, - the enthusiastic but impulsive failure who puts too much trust in his own abilities. Jesus asks, "Do you love (*agapeo*) me more than these?" These what? The boats, the Sea of Galilee, the familiar countryside? Jesus may ask us the same question. Do we put career, home, country before him? Or perhaps he is referring to the other disciples, Peter's friends; does he love him more than he loves them? Almost certainly, however, Jesus has something else in mind; does Peter love him more than the other disciples do? That would be an invidious question but for the fact of Peter's claim "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." (Matt. 26:33) (In fact, it is only Matthew's Gospel that records those words, John himself records only Peter's statement, "I will lay down my life for you" [13:37]) . No doubt, however, Matthew's account would be well known. Peter must have felt desperately ashamed to be reminded of his boast in this way, but it was essential that he be made to face himself if ever he was to become the rock.

In the light of this, Peter cannot bring himself to say that he loves Jesus utterly, although he knows that he has love that is genuine, and so he tones down his reply and says, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Again Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love (*agapeo*) me?" and elicits the same reply, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." The third time it is as though Jesus turns the knife in the wound, he changes the wording to that which Peter has used and asks, "Simon son of John, do you love (*phileo*) me?" John actually records that this hurt Peter and in his despair he cries out, "Lord you know all things; you know that I love you." There is another careful use of words here; the word 'know' on the first occasion, *eido*, implies fullness of knowledge, whereas the second occasion has *ginosko* which often carries an implication of relationship. Peter is saying in effect, "Lord you are omniscient, you know my heart, surely I can at least claim to have *phileo* love." (See note on 13:6-7)

Now we turn to the other two words in the plait; sheep/lambs and feed/tend. Again, some commentators would claim that there is no significance in the interchange of words used. But, again, we would ask why, then, make the interchange? Having accepted that there is some significance, however, the difficulty is to be sure just what it is. The first commission which Jesus gives to Peter is to feed his lambs. The lambs are not necessarily the young in years, but the young in faith. New believers are avaricious for knowledge of their new found faith. They may not always be discerning but they are eager to learn. They must be fed the truth. As time goes by and they become members of the flock, that flock needs shepherding - in fact that is the very word Jesus uses in the second commission *poinaino*. There can be a danger for those who have been believers for a long time that their understanding of God does not grow and they rest in the simple faith of what they

were taught by others when first they believed. But we need to discover for ourselves the fruits of an intimate and personal relationship with God. We believers need stronger meat to challenge us and to help us continue to mature in the faith. (In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. [Heb 5:12-14]) The third commission is, "feed my sheep"

If any believers are reluctant to recognise Peter's authority because of his three denials of the Lord, here is the proof that before his ascension Jesus restored and re-commissioned him.

18-19. These verses may reveal certain background facts. It is believed that Peter died under the atrocities of Nero who committed suicide in 68 CE, so Peter's death must have been before that. Jesus refers to Peter growing old; therefore some scholars argue that Peter could not have been in his early twenties when he was called by Jesus because that would mean he was hardly sixty when he died. However, we cannot be sure what age was considered 'old' in the culture and society of that time. Also the reference to "the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God" does seem to imply that that was already known and so it had already taken place. Therefore this Gospel (or certainly the postscript of this chapter) was written after that; but we have already argued that John wrote his Gospel in old age.

It maybe that these verses hark back to the conversation between Peter and Jesus in the upper room (13:36-38) when the Lord told him that he could not follow him now but would do so later, because here he does instruct Peter to follow him. Also, in telling Peter that he would deny him, Jesus used the words, "I tell you the truth" ("Verily, verily") and uses the same phrase here. But these observations are peripheral.

Although the words of Jesus are addressed specifically to Peter, much of their truth applies to us all. In our youth we do go our own way, we assume that we are masters of our fate; for most of us accidents and illness are things that happen to other people, and even death itself is so far off that it can be ignored. As we approach old age, however, we (or we who live in the west) begin to consider the possibility of having to give up our home and our independence to live in sheltered accommodation and we wonder how we will die. With regard to Peter, however, the Lord prophesied that he would 'stretch out his hands' - a phrase which may well indicate crucifixion. The tradition is that Peter was arrested in Rome and crucified for his faith - asking to be hung upside down because he was not worthy to die in the same way as his Lord; but no one can be certain of this. However v.19 certainly implies death as a martyr. Then there is the reiteration of the invitation/command, "follow me," which he had given at the outset of his earthly ministry.

20-23. Perhaps Peter is so churned up by this incident that he has not appreciated the seriousness of the command "follow me." He turns and sees that John has been following them. It may seem to us that this was insensitive if Jesus wanted to have a private conversation with Peter. But we were not there and cannot judge the actual situation. John and Peter were close friends and John was also particularly close to Jesus ('the disciple whom Jesus loved'). It may well be that John actually overheard this conversation and thus was able to report it in such detail. Be that as it may, Peter asks, "What about him?" Having been told by Jesus of his own future, Peter is interested to learn what lies ahead for John. Natural enough maybe, but Jesus has in mind the future of the Church which is to convey salvation to the world all down the centuries, for which Peter has a crucial and unique role. So is John's but it will be different.

There is a matter of balance here. We need to, and can, learn from the example of other believers, but our loyalty is supremely to Jesus as Lord and we are responsible to him. Each of us has a unique calling and that is what we must follow. So having warned Peter what lies ahead for him (imprisonment and death), he says, "if I should choose that John remains alive until I return, that is between him and me and is nothing to do with you. Peter, do you hear what I am saying to you? You are to follow where I lead you."

Jesus made that reference to John's future as an illustration in contrast to what he had revealed about Peter's; unlike the latter it was a supposition for purposes of argument not a prophesy. However, apparently this

statement had been spread abroad and there was a rumour throughout the Church (the brethren), or at least part of it, that John would not die. The author here refutes that and explains how the misunderstanding arose.

Some scholars believe that this points to the fact that John was still alive at the time this was written. However, that is not necessarily so; John might have died causing some to doubt the faith because a prophecy that he would not die had proved false. In either case the author is at pains to clarify what Jesus actually said.

24. The final sentence of this verse indicates clearly that someone other than John wrote it - perhaps the elders of the church at Ephesus where it is reasonably certain John lived into old age. It could be, of course, that it is only this one verse appended as a testimonial to the truth of the all the rest, but it is more probable that the whole of chapter 21 is written by the same hand. Whoever actually wrote this Gospel it is the work and witness of John the beloved disciple. Those who knew him are convinced of the truth of it. We also can become convinced, not by a study of the words (although that will bring its reward), but by following where the words point - to Jesus. It is like following a path to a promised destination; when we reach the destination we know that the path was reliable.

25. Chapter 20 (the original ending) concludes with a statement that this Gospel is highly selective and that Jesus did many other miraculous signs. That truth is repeated here - with some exaggeration - which we will permit because Jesus is, indeed, so great and none of us has yet experienced all that he is.

\* \* \* \* \*

So I have completed it. It was begun on 29th May 1997 and today is 13th August 2000. My computer tells me that it has taken over 252 hours of working on the document - three weeks of 12 hour days. Which sounds little enough; but that is only the actual writing, and records nothing of the time of reading the thoughts of others nor my own meditation. It has some 124,700 words and I have come to it on 806 occasions over those three and a quarter years. I have a sense of accomplishment but it is tinged with sadness. There are many other books in Scripture which I have not studied in such detail and so I may turn to them, but none I love more than the Gospel of John.

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