

The
NEW TESTAMENT

Translation and Commentary
by
David Morsey

The Gospel
as Told by the
Apostle John

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Preface

The purpose of this project is to provide the Lord's people with a thorough, easy-to-read interpretation of the Bible, verse-by-verse. With this commentary there will be a translation from the original text which will preserve simple dignity and yet eliminate the colloquial and antiquated **expressions**. There will also be an effort to avoid translations that make arbitrary decisions about certain texts which might be taken in several ways. For example, in the descriptions of heaven in Revelation 21:16, it says, "*The city lies foursquare.*" Now the Greek word translated "foursquare," *tetragonos*, can mean "cube" or "four-cornered." If the city is a pyramid, which is quite possible, then "four-cornered" is a good translation. But, if we use the word "cube" then we shut out the possibility of the pyramid, an arbitrary decision which we are not capable of making at this time. Accordingly, we will attempt to stay as close to the literal text as possible, without paraphrases that may take too much liberty.

Foreword

With this lesson we are beginning a chapter-by-chapter study that will encompass the entire Bible. It is our intention in these studies to show as accurately as possible what the Bible teaches. We are not trying to present a reasonable philosophy of life with a reference to the Scripture as a source, but rather, we are attempting to show as faithfully as possible what the Bible teaches about life. We are not here defending the Bible, but only interpreting it. The Holy Spirit Himself must defend the Bible because, after all, it is His Word.

In order to interpret the Bible accurately the following things are essential: (1) The presence and power of the Holy Spirit; (2) a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Bible was written; (3) a knowledge of the history and culture of the periods in which the Bible was written; (4) a personal situation which is free enough to make it unnecessary to defend any particular theological position; and (5) enough personal experience with Christ and with the Bible to provide the high degree of sensitivity that is essential to bring out the best possible meaning among several choices.

The presentation of the truth of God as revealed in the Scripture must be simple enough to be available to all who seek it, and yet profound enough and accurate enough to be assured that we are conveying the message as God intended it to be given. We must come to the Bible not as a textbook to be analyzed, but rather as a revelation from God of the meaning of life especially as it relates to the human spirit and its identity with God. Essentially the Bible reveals to us the nature of God, the nature of man and the nature of man's relationship to God. As a revelation of the nature of God, the Bible becomes a source of nourishment to the spirit which finds its source in the bread of life—Jesus Christ. As a revelation of the nature of man and his relationship to God, the Bible provides guidelines for living.

In this study of the Bible we are going to provide a translation from the original text (Greek in the New Testament and Hebrew in the Old) and with it, comments that will clarify the meaning of the text, providing both the spiritual nourishment and the practical guidelines that were intended from the beginning in the revelation that God has given us.

We are going to begin in the Gospel of John since this gospel provides something of a summary of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the meaning of the life which He lived on the earth. The Gospel of John thus provides a foundation for many of the teachings that are found in the rest of the New Testament.

Author's Translation will be indicated by A.T. following the Scripture reference.

LESSON ONE

John 1:1-14

TRANSLATION

In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God and God was the Word. This One [the Word] was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; not one thing which came into being came without Him. In Him was life and the life was the Light of men and the Light is shining in the darkness and the darkness has not overtaken it. There came [in the course of history] a man sent from God whose name was John [the Baptist]; this man came as a witness, in order that he may bear witness concerning the light, in order that all men might believe through him. He was not that light but came in order that he may bear witness concerning the light. That was the true light which, coming into the world, lights every man. He was in the world and the world came into being through Him and the world did not know Him. He came unto His own things [that is, the things which He had made] and His own people did not accept Him. But as many as received Him, He gave to them the authority to become children of God, that is to those who believe on His name, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a man but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt [temporarily, as in a tent] among us, and we beheld His glory, a glory as of the only begotten [one of a kind] from the Father, full of grace and truth.

COMMENTARY

The Eternal Logos

The phrase, “**in the beginning**,” takes us back to the moment when the space-time universe emerged. The book of Genesis also starts with this phrase. Back of this moment the human mind has no point of reference. There is no way that the natural mind can comprehend that which came before its own existence, unless the author of that existence should choose to reveal such matters. However, it is possible that until the mind reaches its fullest recovery in the glorified state, even if God should choose to reveal these matters it is not possible for the human mind to receive

them. Thus it is unsound for us to enter into debate regarding what transpired prior to the beginning of the space-time realm. It is futile to ask such questions as: “What was God doing in eternity past?” or the even more absurd question, “Who made God?” From the very beginning the Bible assumes that God created all things, although it does not go into specific detail as to exactly how this took place. The account of creation in the book of Genesis leaves many things unsaid as to God’s method of creation. The whole debate over the subject of evolution is for the most part an unprofitable one. After

all, the whole evolutionary hypothesis is a highly speculative one. For the most part, the Bible gives very simple statements about the matter of creation without going into the kind of detail that would be necessary to make positive judgments about it, other than the conclusion that God had a direct hand in all aspects of creation. John goes beyond the Genesis account of creation by telling us that the One who actually carried out the process of creation was the One called the Word, or in the Greek text, the "Logos." Now who was this One called the Word? John tells us in simple terms that He was a person, that He was with God, and that in fact, He was God. This Word is so basic to the whole meaning of God's revelation to man that we are going to spend just a little bit of time studying the Word. John borrows this expression from the Greeks, and so we must ask what the Greeks intended by it. The Greeks used this expression hundreds of years before Jesus came into existence. The Bible gives it new meaning as applied to Christ. Many early Greek philosophers saw the realm of ideas, or mind, as the most real aspect of the universe. In fact, to many of them, the realm of the "idea" was divine. Of course they saw this divinity as possessed by man himself. But to them the expression, "Word" was more than merely a unit of speech. They saw it as an internal process of revelation. To them, the world of the ideal was the world of the real. John, the Apostle of Jesus, making use of this expanded meaning of the word, applies it to Jesus Christ; declaring that the eternal reality which they were seeking was in fact to be found in Jesus Christ, the true revelation of God.

Thus, as John used the term, it meant the eternal revelation of God to man which took human form in the person of Jesus. According to John, the Word [Logos] was in reality an eternal part of the Godhead. Since the Godhead is spirit, it was

necessary for God to provide a intermediary between Himself and a space-time universe which He elected to create. The Logos was that intermediary. God projected Himself into a space-time realm through a living revelation called the Logos [Word]. The Logos did not immediately take on a fleshly form. This took place at the birth of Jesus. In verse 14, John says that the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us; however, in the first verse he tells us that the Logos was already present with God at the beginning of the universe. He further says that this Logos was the one who actually was the Creator of the universe. Many scientists today, perhaps the great majority of them, consider it reasonable to assume that this universe started at some point in time with a great explosion, a release of energy which sent an almost infinite number of particles out into space. The Bible says that this energy release was in reality the Word of God. God projected Himself in a great burst of energy and life, which was personalized in Christ and later incarnated [made flesh] in Jesus. Jesus is the human form of Christ, the Logos, the living revelation of the Godhead.

Jesus made it possible for human beings on the earth to behold the glory of God, as he dwelt among us. By His death and resurrection, as we shall later see, He made available to man the possibility of becoming actually an adopted child of God. John says further that all we need to do to become children of God is to receive Him. Later, in chapter 14, we will learn that this whole process takes place through His Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ, comes into our spirits when we ask Him to. The Holy Spirit within us then energizes us with the power of God to be able to relate to Him throughout eternity. This aspect of the Holy Spirit will be discussed later.

In summary, the eternal Godhead projected Himself by means of a living revelation—

called the Word, or Logos—out of eternity into the creation of a space-time universe including a world of created beings and things. This living revelation was the source of all life, and that life brought light into the existing void and darkness. The darkness has never prevented the light from shining, and this light has lighted man's way to God, so that no one today need to be in darkness. All men may come to God if they wish. Man was created with a free will, and could choose either to receive or to reject the light.

Many rejected the light, and for thousands of years God allowed man to see the

consequences of that rejection in the increasing tragedies and chaos of human existence. Then at a point in time the Living Revelation, the Logos, came into the world as Jesus. The time was the height of the Roman Empire. Human power seemed to be at its peak, but spiritual darkness threatened to destroy civilization. Into this darkness came Jesus with the glory of God, offering to all who would receive it the authority to become the sons of God. This Jesus would show to all mankind that the Master of the Universe was reaching out in benevolence and truth to draw all men unto Himself.

LESSON TWO

John 1:15-18

TRANSLATION

John [the Baptist] gave testimony concerning Him and called out saying, “This One was He concerning Whom I said, He Who is coming after me has existed before me because He was prior to me.” Because, of His fullness have we all received, and grace succeeding grace [in a perpetual flow]; because the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. No one has beheld God at any time; the only begotten God Who is in the bosom of the Father, that One has unfolded Him.

COMMENTARY

God's Gift to Man—Grace and Reality

The apostle John is declaring positively and without qualification that Jesus did exist before John [the Baptist], although He had been born physically six months after John. Thus, Jesus existing on the earth as a human being was in reality the physical presence of Christ, the Logos, the projected expression of God, Who was responsible for the creation of the space-time universe. He further declares that Jesus has been the source of a divine fullness that we have all received. Through Christ, and the physical form which He took upon the earth, called Jesus, there is an endless flow of divine grace to all who will receive it. But what do the words *grace* and *fullness* really mean? The Greek word for grace, *charis*, has its roots in the word that is used for a gift that is freely given—given without any charge whatsoever. To think of the grace as being unmerited favor, or a gift that one does not deserve, robs the word of its richness. It also robs God of credit for a pure and unselfish expression of love. If you give someone a gift and then remind them of how little they deserve that gift, it

tarnishes both the gift and giver and leaves the receiver with a feeling of resentment instead of appreciation. Considering the background of the Greek word, **grace** (or *charis*) means an abundant gift of divine benevolence or kindness. The focus is really on the abundance of the giver rather than on the unworthiness of the receiver. To bring into the word the idea of unmerited favor is to add something that is not really there. In the phrase, **grace succeeding grace**, the word translated **succeeding**, means basically in place of, and carries with it the idea of replacing one thing with another continuously so that there is no gap. It would be used of the host or hostess who never lets the cup of the guest become empty. This grace comes into being **through** Jesus Christ. While Moses was merely an agent by whom the Law was given, Jesus Christ was the source from which the grace of God came to man. One may believe Moses and the Law and practice it. One receives Jesus Christ, and His grace becomes part of the very being. The kindness of God is like a flow of energy

within our beings when we receive Jesus Christ.

Receiving the fullness of God, then, means that all that God is, flows through us. We are not really part of all that God is, but rather, all that God is touches us and energizes us. He affects us with the flow of His divine benevolence. The key word here is, receive. If we **receive** something from God, it is obvious that we are something other than He and outside of Him. John is not saying that we are all a part of God, but rather, that God makes Himself a part of us. In this fullness that we receive from God, there is also reality, or truth. The Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, means reality. It is bringing into focus that which is absolute. Some may say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. To say such a thing is contradictory, because the one that says it is making a statement that he considers to be absolute. The word "absolute" means something that stands complete within itself and is not subject to change by forces outside of it. The reason it is important to speak of this word is that many today consider life and the universe to be always in a state of change and that nothing is fixed or permanent. Applied to truth, it means that there is nothing dependable, nothing we can use as a fixed guideline. Applied to morality it means that there is no basic standard, but that everyone does what suits his own particular purpose. The Bible says that there is such a thing as truth and reality and that human beings on the earth can find it and base their lives upon it.

We are not debating the philosophical logic of this, we are only stating that the Bible declares that this is so. The truth and reality which John talks about is only found in Jesus Christ. Everything else in the universe is indeed subject to change. So much of life is an illusion and a disappointment. God is our only sure anchor. The quest for happiness is so often

disappointing because when we think we finally have it, it is not what we thought it was and it passes away so quickly. Part of the fullness, then, which God shares with us is His reality. All things in time and eternity find their reality in God. When we take Christ into our hearts we have an anchor sure and steadfast.

John reminds us that God is spirit, and not experienced through the natural human senses. It is very futile to try to find God through the application of natural laws. The scientist who says, "I cannot believe God because I cannot prove Him in the laboratory," misses the entire point. "*God is spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). We do not experience music through the eyes nor fine paintings through the ears. Just so, we do not experience God through the natural human senses. If someone were to say, "That is a very beautiful painting," and I were to reply, "Well, I put my ear up to it and I can't hear a thing," I would be regarded as very foolish, if not out of my mind.

The phrase **only begotten** God indicates that this Jesus about whom John is talking, is in reality, God. When Christ took on human nature, He did not lose the nature of God that was in Him. He emerged on the earth as an only begotten Son. The term, "**only begotten**" means one of a kind, and usually refers to a child who has no brothers or sisters. Jesus was in every respect the true Son of God, and no one in heaven or upon earth throughout time or eternity has ever been in that relationship to God. The phrase, "**only begotten**" is used to make a distinction between Jesus Christ as the true Son of God, and human beings who have come into a position of sonship by adoption through the receiving of the Son of God into their hearts. The oneness between Jesus and God is indicated by the expression "**in the bosom of the father**," which does not refer to a physical

position, but rather, in a figurative sense, of the heart, or Spirit of God. The Spirit of

Jesus; and the Spirit of Christ; and the Spirit of God are, in fact, one.

LESSON THREE

John 1:19-28

TRANSLATION

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews from Jerusalem sent to him priests and Levites that they might ask him. “Who are you?” And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed that, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him “Who are you? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” And he answered, “No.” They said then to him, “Who are you? in order that we may give an answer to those who sent us; what do you say concerning yourself?” He said, “I am a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ even as Isaiah the prophet said.” And they who were being sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him and said to him “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, neither Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them and said, “I baptize in water; there stands one in the midst of you whom you do not know, who is coming after me, whose sandal thongs I am not worthy to untie:” These things took place in Bethany near the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

COMMENTARY

The Voice in the Wilderness

John the Baptist is, of course, the witness who is here giving his testimony. The Pharisees, correct and complacent, were highly suspicious of this “wild man from the wilderness,” who dared to suggest that all was not well with the religious system of the day. They demanded to know by what authority he invaded their sacred province. John made no claims for himself whatsoever. He was certainly not the Christ; and he was not Elijah; nor would he even lay claim to the role of that mysterious prophet figure of Deuteronomy (18:15) who would be a direct word from God in days of restoration which were to come. Apparently John was not fully aware of the import either of himself or of his mission. In his

own mind he was merely a voice crying in the wilderness, a very small part indeed of the preparation for the coming of the Messiah. In the Gospel of Matthew (17:10-13), it is recorded that Jesus, Himself, identified John the Baptist as a fulfillment, in type at least, of Elijah. This implication, even the disciples, normally rather slow to understand, clearly perceived. But now we must ask, who was John the Baptist; what was his mission; what was the meaning of his baptism; and who was Elijah?

The story of John the Baptist is given in chapter one of the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke. The prophecy concerning the mission of John the Baptist is given in

Isaiah 40. According to the brief accounts of his birth and life given in Mark and Luke, John was born as a miracle to Zachariah, one of the priests, and Elizabeth. Elizabeth was a relative (possible cousin) of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Zachariah and Elizabeth were told that their son, John, was to be especially appointed of God for a mission. The mission, as outlined in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, was to be the preparing of the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. According to the prophecies of Isaiah, the children of Israel were to be taken captive into Babylon, as a result of their idolatry and rebellion against God. The extent of their punishment is outlined in the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah. In addition to the captivity, God ordained that there should be a blindness as to the truth and a hardness of heart.

In time, He would send His Messiah to deliver them from this darkness and blindness. The Messiah was Jesus. According to Isaiah 40, God would send a messenger to his people Israel, who would break the silence of God, offer His comfort, and give them instruction and help in the recovering of their position with Him, so that they would be ready to receive the Messiah. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. By being so baptized, the Israelite would be acknowledging to God that His people had indeed offended Him and sinned against Him and that he, as an Israelite, wanted to join those who were repenting of this. Later Jesus, Himself, would receive this baptism of repentance, not because He had participated in the offense, but that He wanted to identify Himself with the faithful remnant of Israel. After Jesus permitted Himself to be baptized by John, He Himself joined with John in baptizing with this baptism of repentance. John 3 goes into more detail about Jesus' activities in this matter. Before John was ready to begin his

ministry, he spent some time in the wilderness living on locusts and wild honey, and clothing himself with skins. Here, no doubt, he had his encounter with God through which he received the message and the power that were necessary to accomplish his task. It was thus that he was considered to be a wild man, and even, by some, to be out of his mind. It should be noted here that many times, when God is dealing with an individual, He draws him away from the crowd, and puts him in a position where he is easily misunderstood and criticized.

Now as for Elijah, his story is found in the early chapters of the book of II Kings. He, like John, was also a man of the wilderness; a man misunderstood, and a man with a mission from God. And, like John, he challenged the religious system of the day which was the idolatrous and vile fertility cult of the goddess, Astarte, and presided over by that "queen of evil," Jezebel. Elijah won his right to Satan's wrath by winning a contest with Jezebel's priests, the priests of Baal, and had to flee for his life. John was not so fortunate. He was actually beheaded for crossing another wicked queen, Herodius. Elijah had come in a very dark hour of Israel's history, and became the type of John the Baptist, the messenger who heralded the coming of the Light of the world. By his own words, Jesus acknowledged John to be, at least in a measure, the fulfillment of a prophecy in Malachi 4:5, that Elijah would be sent in the end times before the restoration of all things. How literally true this is we do not really know. Elijah did appear with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17. It was this occasion at which Jesus linked John the Baptist with Elijah. Whether or not there is to be some further appearance of either a resurrected Elijah, or someone typified by Elijah, is not

totally clear. Some think that one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11, is Elijah. None of this is really certain. But of one thing we can be certain, however. John the Baptist was not aware of the full extent of his ministry on the earth, except that he did sense that he had a special mission to perform. With many of God's servants this has been true. The full impact of their ministry has not emerged often until after their death. The Apostle Paul is an

example. Paul must have sensed that his message was from God to the church, and it was most important. It is doubtful that he expected his letters to the churches to become part of the canon of the Holy Bible. The vessel must be clay, that the glory may be of God. John said, "**He must increase and I must decrease**" (3:30). Such an attitude is essential to the man of God who desires to be a vessel or channel for the Spirit of God to reach His people.

LESSON FOUR

John 1:29-34

TRANSLATION

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This one is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me there comes a Man who existed before me, because He was prior to me.’ And I did not know Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, for this reason I came baptizing with water.” And John gave testimony saying, “I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven and it remained upon Him. And I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptise with water, that One said to me, ‘Upon whomever you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this One is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I beheld and gave testimony that this is the Son of God.”

COMMENTARY

The Lamb of God for the Sin of Man

Then came Jesus. As John was drawing to the close of his mission, the time was ripe for Jesus to emerge and take up His own work. Jesus was now thirty years old, approximately. He had been working in His father's carpenter shop, as we suppose. He had been most careful not to call too much attention to Himself, for, as He Himself indicated, His time had not yet come. Now He is coming to John. He will be baptized by him, midst the protests of John himself. It was necessary before He could begin His work. Now John would fade from the scene and Jesus would take the preeminence. Meanwhile John must present the Messiah to his people, Israel. The very first words uttered about Him were, **“Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”** There is no clearer statement of Jesus' mission to the world than this one. He did not come to bring about social

reform; He did not come as a warrior to deliver Israel from the oppression of Rome; and He did not come to head the religious hierarchy. He came for one thing. He came to remove the barrier of sin that existed between God and mankind, and thus to restore the relationship between God and His creation. Once the corrupting effects of sin were removed the process of the glorification of God's creation could resume unhindered. As God intended His original creation to be, so shall we be. Jesus represents all that God had intended Adam to be, since Jesus took upon Him the nature of man before the Fall. In I John 3:2, we are told that one day we shall be like Jesus, but this can only take place as our spirits are given new life. This new life is the life which was lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. For those who may not be familiar with this part of man's history, we

suggest that they read the first three chapters of Genesis. In these chapters one will find that God is credited with creating man out of the dust of the earth, and breathing into him something of His Spirit. In the Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was originally written, the word used for breath which God breathed into man (*nishmah*), is different than the word used for the breath of animals. It is a very special word which carries with it a meaning that applies primarily to something of God. In other words, God breathed into man something of His Spirit when He first created him. Then, according to the Genesis account, God placed this man whom He created in the Garden of Eden which He had prepared for him, and gave him a special test of obedience. Apparently, if man had passed this test of obedience God would have gone on with a process of glorifying man and establishing him forever in association with Himself. The penalty for failing the test was in fact death, which apparently meant the loss of this special spirit quality which God had given him. (He did not die immediately in the physical sense.) Man failed the test that he had been given and was expelled from the Garden, which God had placed him in originally; and was left to live out the tragic consequences of his failure. Immediately there began in the world an endless conflict between man and the forces of evil which were unleashed in that garden. At the same time God began a process of recovery for His fallen creature.

As the narrative of man unfolds in the books of the Old Testament, so there is an unfolding of the plan of recovery (or "redemption," as it is called), which God will use. Almost immediately there is the requirement of a blood sacrifice. The sacrifice of an animal will be accepted by God as a substitute for the physical death

which God would otherwise have required. The penalty of sin was death. And God will accept the death of the animal in place of the death of the man. The animal which God ordained for this was a lamb. Throughout the Old Testament many laws were established regarding this sacrifice, but the ultimate end of all these sacrifices was deliverance of man from the penalty and the power of death. Under the terms of the Old Testament, or Covenant, which God made with His people in regard to sacrifice, a sacrifice of a lamb had to be made every year on what was called the *Day of Atonement*. This went on for over a thousand years of human history. As long as the terms of the covenant were met, man remained in good relationship to God. Throughout the Old Testament prophecies, there is repeatedly the promise that someday there would be a new covenant where one sacrifice *only* would suffice to cancel out, forever, the penalty which had been levied at the Garden of Eden. The only sacrifice that would be adequate for such a covenant was the Son of God. God would send to the world a Son, and this Son would be the sacrifice. The Son would, of course, possess the nature of God, but would also participate in the human race by being actually born of a woman. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the narrative of this birth. A Child was born to a virgin, Mary. As God had created the seeds of life in the beginning of the world, so now through His Holy Spirit He implanted a seed within Mary which would fertilize her own natural egg and go through all stages of the birth process, so that the Child which came forth would be truly human. The seed, of course, was the Spirit of God, so that, while this Child was truly human He was also truly divine—the Son of God. The name of this Child was Jesus. Now, this Jesus, the Son of God is being presented to the world by John the Baptist and he says

of Him, **Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**

L E S S O N F I V E

John 1:29-34 (continued)

The Spirit of God for the Heart of Man

Now again, John reminds the people that this One whom he has been talking about, Jesus, the **Lamb of God**, actually existed before him. Remember that Jesus was the physical embodiment of Christ. Christ was identified as the **Word [Logos]**, who existed in the beginning as a part of God. At God's instructions, John was baptizing his fellow Israelites, who wished to be identified with those who were looking for the coming Messiah. John says that he did not know Him. Since John was a relative of Jesus, he could hardly have meant that he did not know Him as a person. Apparently he did not know that his kinsman was actually the Son of God. Evidently Jesus' early life was so normal as to outward appearances that even those close to Him, His relatives and neighbors, did not realize that there was something very special about Him. Later when Jesus visited the region in which He grew up, and made claims for Himself as the Messiah, the people were shocked and unbelieving. In fact, some even wanted to kill Him as a blasphemer. It was necessary for Jesus to grow up in a normal way so that He could experience the things that human beings go through in their sojourn on the earth. In a later reference to Jesus in Hebrews 2:17-18, we read, "*Whence it was necessary for Him to be made like His brethren in all things, in order that He may be a merciful and faithful high priest with reference to the things pertaining to God; in order that He may expiate [appease or satisfy God] the sins of the people. In that He Himself*

suffered having been tested, He is able to help those who are being tested." It is not just poetic fancy to say that Jesus understands our troubles. Also in the book of Hebrews, is a remarkable and comforting invitation to us: '*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, having been tempted in all ways like us, yet without sin. Let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and find grace for a timely help*' (4:15-16).

Since, apparently, John did not really know that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, it was necessary for God to identify Him to John. Thus, he was told that a dove would come out of heaven and light upon Jesus and stay upon Him long enough to make the identification positive. This dove would, in fact, be an expression of or projection of the very Spirit of God. Certainly, not all of the Spirit of God was to be contained in the dove, any more than all of the Spirit of God was contained in Jesus. All of Jesus was possessed by the Spirit of God, but not all of the Spirit of God was contained in Jesus. The Godhead is the universal Spirit that is greater than the universe and remains eternally as the controlling force of the universe. This eternal Spirit often projected Himself in various physical forms both in the Old Testament and in the New. Thus, God communicated to man through appearances that had human form, as in the case of the visitors to Abraham in the book of Genesis, and sometimes even in the

form of animals such as the mule in the story of the ill-fated prophet Balaam, in the book of Numbers.

In the account of the episode of the baptism of Jesus recorded by Matthew (3:13-17), we are told that a voice came out of heaven saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.*" There need be no confusion over this problem of how God could be Jesus; being baptized; and a dove sitting upon His own shoulder; and a voice out of heaven. Remember that there is certainly more to the Godhead than Jesus upon the earth, and there was more to the Spirit of God than a dove. The great eternal Godhead, Who is Spirit, could certainly project Himself to earth in various forms at the same time. This does not make Jesus any the less a real person, nor did it make the dove any the less a real bird.

Now comes this most important expression, **This One is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.** Again there need be no confusion if we take the word in a simple way. John was performing a ritual which was symbolic of cleansing and repentance. It also symbolized the identification of the individual with God's purposes in the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of Israel. John's baptism was something external. It did not actually change the heart. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was quite another matter. This baptism actually resulted in the coming of the Holy Spirit into the heart or spirit of man. In chapter three Jesus told a famous Pharisee, Nicodemus, that unless he would be born both of water and the spirit he could not see the kingdom of God. This experience was referred to as being born again. By being born again Jesus explained that Nicodemus would have a new spirit within him—the very Spirit of God. This is the ultimate intention of God's redemptive purpose.

Under the terms of the Old Testament or Covenant, man was related to God by following His Law, but nothing was actually changed in terms of his inner spirit. In the New Covenant, or New Testament, God actually comes into the spirit of man by means of His own Holy Spirit and brings about a total change or reorientation of the human spirit. Thus, man cannot be properly related to God merely by believing ideas about God. He must have God's very Spirit *within* him in order to consider himself part of God's family. Thus, in an earlier part of this chapter, John says, "*As many as received Him, He gave them the authority to become the children of God.*" To receive Him means to receive His Holy Spirit into our very being.

The ultimate fulfillment of this promise made here in John, does not take place until after Jesus has died and risen again. Jesus tells His disciples in chapters fourteen and sixteen of John that the Holy Spirit will come after He goes away. Accordingly, in the book of Acts, after Jesus has risen from the dead, and returned to glory, the Holy Spirit does come to take His place in the hearts of all who will be His followers. But, we are getting ahead of the story. If you wish to look ahead, you may read John 14, 16, 20 and Acts 1 and 2. The full discussion of these passages will have to come later.

Meanwhile, if one wishes to be so related to God, it is not necessary to understand all the implications of this relationship. One has only to ask God to come into his life and His Spirit will come. Luke records Jesus as saying, "*If you then, being evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much rather shall the Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*" (11:13). It is, in fact, not possible for the human mind to truly grasp the meaning of God and His

redemption, apart from the Holy Spirit. In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, he says, "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to*

know them, because they are discerned by the Spirit" (I Corinthians 2:14). In fact, before going on with these studies, it would be well for one, in a simple way, to ask for the help of the Spirit of God.

L E S S O N S I X

John 1:35-51

TRANSLATION

The next day, again John [the Baptist] stood and two of his disciples, and looked upon Jesus as He was walking and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” And two of his disciples heard him speaking and they followed Jesus; and Jesus turned and beheld them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” They said to Him, “Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, teacher), where do you dwell?” He said to them, “Come and you shall see”: They came then and saw where He was dwelling, and remained with Him that day; it was about the tenth hour. Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter, one of the two who heard from John and followed Him [that is, Jesus]; this one first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah (which is being interpreted, the Christ)” He led him to Jesus. Jesus looked upon him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John, you shall be called Cephas (which means rock).” The next day He wanted to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, from the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found the One concerning whom Moses wrote in the Law; and the prophets [also wrote about]; Jesus, the son of Joseph, who is from Nazareth.” And Nathanael said to him, “Is it possible for anything good to be from Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said concerning him, “Behold truly an Israelite, in whom is no deceit.” Nathanael said to Him, “Whence do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you while you were under the fig tree I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “In absolute truth I say to you, you shall see heaven standing open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

COMMENTARY

The Encounter with Jesus

Jesus' first encounter with the people as He went out among them to begin his public ministry really set the tone of the continuing relationship that He will have to human beings on the earth. And what will be His attitude toward them? Will He be the austere and aloof religious leader? Will He be the harsh critic and judge of humanity? Will He be patronizing? Contemptuous? Angry at the world? Will He be the radical revolutionary? Crusader? Given the condition of the world into which He came, He might be any of these with some degree of justification. But He was none of these things. This very chapter gives us a deep insight into the nature of Himself, and the relationship which He will bear to mankind. We find Him sensitive and not censorious in the presence of human need. We see Him warm and human. We see Him interested in the individual, and not demanding that His time be more profitably consumed with the masses. We see Him taking hold immediately of His mission to change human lives, as in the case of Cephas—**You are ... you shall be.** We see Him exercising great sensitivity in His perception of the human heart, as in the case of Nathanael in whom He **found no deceit.**

The tone of His ministry is set. While at times it will be necessary for Him to deal sternly and even sometimes violently with the religious leaders of the day; as far as the people are concerned, He will be to them the tender shepherd. Matthew, one of His disciples, who also gives us an account of Jesus' life in the Gospel which he wrote, captures this spirit in an episode which is recorded in Matthew 9:36. "*And beholding the crowd He was moved with compassion concerning them, because they were beaten [flayed, mangled] and fallen to the ground as sheep not having a shepherd [that is, pursued to the point of exhaustion].*" He saw

the religious leaders as phony and hypocritical and as having abandoned the sheep over whom God had made them shepherds. Some day these false shepherds would receive their just due from God; but, meanwhile Jesus comes as the True Shepherd, who loves the sheep enough to give His life for them. He comes not with condemnation, but with salvation. In John 3:17, we read, "*For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*" He came not to pass judgment, but to bring deliverance.

It is fascinating to note that Jesus opened His public ministry and closed it on the same tender, shepherd-like note. In John 21, we have the account of Jesus' last hours with His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension into glory. On that occasion the disciples are fishing. Jesus concerns Himself with their success in this simple earthly task, sees to it that they have a good "catch," and then proceeds to prepare breakfast for them on the shore. This is a most astounding and revealing episode. It is astounding because who would ever imagine, if they were making up this story, that after such a world-shattering event as the resurrection, Jesus should concern Himself with such simple routine matters as fish and breakfast? And if some writer had been making up this story, he would certainly assume that no one would believe that these disciples could simply return to their fish. Apparently, after this event they did leave the fish for good and get about the task of telling the Good News to the world. The episode is revealing, because it shows us the heart of God. He does indeed care for the individual. He does not sit in an ivory tower, nor make grand pronouncements. He rather reveals His glory and grandeur in simplicity.

All through the Gospels, the glory and power of God is expressed in simple episodes, that nothing may detract from it. The diamond must be displayed on dark velvet. The message to all, who in this day attend to this ancient record, is that God identified with us not so much in grand religious experiences as in the simple routine of daily living. He is not beyond being concerned with our daily bread and with the frustrations and afflictions and sufferings of human beings upon the earth. The sheep quietly graze in the pasture, completely confident in the care of the shepherd. Perhaps the greatest expression of faith and devotion that human beings can give to God is to go about the daily routines of life in the quiet confidence that God is with them.

In the first encounters that Jesus has with His disciples, this nearness and simplicity is revealed. It is a fitting introduction to His ministry. All the prophecies of the Old Testament indicate that the Messiah, who is to come, will remove the barriers between man and God and bring them together. In Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, he records that an angel appeared to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and among other things, told him that the Child that was to be born should be called Immanuel, which is a Hebrew phrase meaning, "God with us." The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation is a record of God's purpose to restore fallen man and bring him back together with Himself. This is the reason that He came to earth in the form of Jesus.

Now as He encounters these men who will become His disciples, He takes time with them in a personal way. He sees into their

hearts with great insight and identifies with them. He promises Peter that one day he will be a rock. Perhaps Peter could not even understand what He meant, much less accept it; but one day the prophecy would certainly come true.

This whole narrative of Jesus' personal interaction with these men is a revelation to us that God also cares about us in the same way. All who follow Christ today may have this same personal attention. Throughout the New Testament there are promises to this effect. For example, Philippians 1:6: "*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun in you a good work will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ.*" It would be well to read Romans 8, Ephesians 3, and Philippians 3, to see how extensive is God's promise to bring about in our heart the changes that are necessary to become the kind of person that He wants us to be.

In the closing words of this passage, Jesus seems to promise Nathanael a very special vision. There is no record of this particular vision occurring to him. It is not the episode of the descending of the dove at the baptism of Jesus, because that has already taken place. It does not refer to the transfiguration, because Nathanael was not there. Either it was an experience Nathanael had personally, that was not recorded in the Gospels, or it has a symbolic meaning. Whether or not it occurred literally, is unimportant. Symbolically, it is of great importance. The whole purpose of Jesus coming to the earth was to remove the barrier between man and God—to open up heaven and give man access to God.

LESSON SEVEN

John 2:1-11

TRANSLATION

And the third day there was a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited unto the wedding feast. And when they ran short of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They do not have wine.” And Jesus said to her, “What is there in common between me and you in this matter, woman [Greek title of respect]? My hour has not yet com.” His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Now there were sitting there six stone water jars according to the purifying of the Jews; holding two or three measures [approximately twenty or thirty gallons] apiece. Jesus said to them, “Fill the water jars with water.” And they filled them to the brim. And He said to them, “Draw out now and bear to the ruler of the feast,” and they bore it. And as the ruler of the feast tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know whence it was: (but the servants who had drawn the water knew;) the ruler of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Every man sets out the good wine first, and when people are intoxicated, the worse; you have kept the good wine till now.” This first of the signs [miracles], Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Miracle at Cana of Galilee

Jesus had now begun His earthly ministry. He will have about three years to complete the task of changing the world—an awesome assignment even for the Son of God. He will have to move decisively and effectively. He begins by gathering to Himself a small band of ordinary men who know how to fish, but are otherwise totally unprepared for the task that is ahead. Again, the tone of His ministry is set. He will use the weak to confound the mighty. The reason is important. God alone can save the world. He will do it through

human agents, but these agents must be absolutely submissive to Him. They must be channels through which God may direct His Holy Spirit in communication with the world. They will be carriers of the message; not creators of the message. The religious leaders of the day would not do, because they had become prisoners of human religious tradition and seekers after power and the praise of men. Jesus will take the raw material of ordinary men and fashion them into effective instruments of His Holy Spirit. The growing power of the Spirit of

God within Jesus was such that when He called these men, they lost no time leaving what they were doing to follow Him.

A few days after Jesus' encounter with these men, there is an invitation to Him, with His family, to attend a wedding feast. Already, the men whom He had called were identified with Him as His disciples, and were invited with Him to the wedding. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus did not shun social gatherings. It is not wise to form patterns from either John or Jesus in this matter. Both were examples of total commitment to their purpose in the world, but the work of each was carried on in a different manner.

It is significant that the third day is mentioned. As a point of time it was probably related to Jesus' encounter with His disciples which has just taken place. Symbolically, it brings to mind the third day of resurrection. Jesus, Himself, uses this symbolism in a reference to the prophet Jonah as recorded in Matthew 12. Jonah was an Old Testament prophet who had been instructed to go to a town called Ninevah, and urge them to repentance. Jonah refused the assignment from God and took a voyage instead. When a great storm arose, Jonah, assuming that God was punishing him and not wanting the rest of the ship's crew to suffer, asked to be thrown overboard. His request was promptly granted by the terrified seamen and he was swallowed by a great fish [not a whale]. He spent three days and three nights inside the fish before God miraculously delivered him. He was cast out on the shore by the fish, and decided that he would go to Ninevah after all. This narrative is recorded in a book of the Old Testament that bears the name of the prophet. Jesus takes this narrative and uses it as a symbol of His own death and resurrection. It is

interesting to notice here the way that Jesus uses allegories, illustrations and symbolism. Every part of the story or symbol does not always apply. Here, in this story, the disobedience of the prophet is, of course, not to be applied to Jesus, who was never disobedient. However, it can be said that He took upon Himself the sin and disobedience of man, and so, while He was three days in a state of death, He did represent the sin of man.

We have taken time with this matter of the third day, because it has very important symbolic meaning. This will be Jesus' first miracle. It heralds the bringing of new life to the old Jewish faith. The old Law had spoken only of penalty and death for disobedience; the new Covenant which Jesus will make possible, brings life. It would be well to read the third chapter of II Corinthians, where the contrast is made between the Law of Moses, which brings death, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who brings life.

In the midst of the wedding feast, they ran out of wine. Here again, the symbolism is important. All through the Old Testament, wine was a symbol, both of joy and of God's abundant provision. In the Old Testament, God makes a promise to His people through the prophet Isaiah. "*And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fattening, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined!*" (Isaiah 25:6). The old order had failed. The Law was not adequate to change the hearts of men. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises the people that even though they had failed Him and turned to idols, He would restore them someday. Because of their failure, they lost God's blessing on their nation. They would go through a long period of darkness and spiritual death. Then God would deliver

them and restore to them His abundant provisions. Symbolically, this has to do with spiritual restoration. God would send His Holy Spirit to change their hearts, which the Law had failed to do. Now comes Jesus into the midst of a nation that is suffering spiritual death. The wine of God's joy and provision has run out. The time has come for God to deliver them and to restore life and joy. The first miracle of Jesus symbolizes this restoration.

This same symbolism can be applied to the life of an individual. There are many ways in which a person seeks joy and meaning to life. But since this world is God's creation, He alone can provide that satisfaction. When we take His Spirit into our spirit we then have the capacity to identify with Him in the meaning of the universe. That is, we are able to harmonize with His purpose. We are satisfied because we have the sense that life is full of meaning. That meaning is tied up with the eternal purposes of God and we will go on with Him forever.

L E S S O N E I G H T

John 2:1-11 (continued)

The Miracle of the Wine—The Hour Has Come

Now as to the actual performing of the miracle, it was Jesus' mother who brought the matter to His attention. Apparently, she was either a relative or a good friend of the bride or bridegroom, else she would not have taken it upon herself to get involved in the problem. It was important enough to her to feel that she ought to enlist the aid of Jesus. While the other members of Jesus' family apparently did not know or believe in His Messiahship, as was stated earlier, this would not have been true of Mary. She knew, if no one else did, that no man had been responsible for her pregnancy. She had kept this in her heart, and pondered it over the many years of Jesus' early life; however, there is no record that she ever called upon Him to do anything special for her. In fact, as the text says later, this was His first miracle. This statement discounts the many traditional, but unverified legends about Jesus' childhood, which indicate that He used to do such things as making clay birds and breathing life into them. There is no authentic account of Jesus' life between the time that He was in the temple in Jerusalem with His parents and the time that He finally emerged at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Apparently Jesus' mother had patiently waited out three decades of her Son's life when nothing seemed to be happening, still clinging to the conviction that He was indeed the Messiah. Now, for some reason, she appeals to Him to break the silence and do something at this wedding. No doubt the Holy Spirit prompted her to make this

request since indeed the time had come for Him to manifest His glory. Jesus' immediate reaction to the request was that His time had not yet come. Perhaps He, Himself, had to receive direction from the Spirit of God within Him that this was the occasion on which He should manifest Himself as the Son of God Who worked miracles. Throughout His ministry Jesus made it clear that the working of miracles would be His accreditation as the Son of God. Now, He must begin to make Himself known to all who will receive Him. The miracles were really not so much a proof to the unbeliever that Jesus was the Messiah, but to the believer who was ready to receive it. Even the faithful, awaiting God's promised Messiah, must have some proof of Messiahship. Those who were not ready to receive the truth did not receive it no matter what Jesus did. To those who today want God to do some miracle for them in order to prove Himself to them, it must be said that no miracle will ever be great enough to satisfy the one who does not want to believe. Jesus says that faith comes on the basis of the will to believe. Jesus said, "*If anyone will to do His [God's] will, he shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God, or I am speaking from myself*" (John 7:17). The human will gets in the way of belief.

People do not wish to give up their independence or their right to themselves. Their failure to receive God is based more upon the desire for independence than upon

honest doubts about the Divine. For anyone to come to faith, there must be an action of the Holy Spirit within them. When one comes to the end of himself, and realizes his need for help and turns in the direction of God, then the Holy Spirit will come to aid in the search for faith. Jesus said that He came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance. He said this to the Pharisees, who thought that they needed no help. He was willing to let them continue in that illusion. Thus, this miracle at Cana of Galilee would be God's witness to the faithful Jewish remnant, who were expecting the Messiah, that this was indeed the Son of God.

Jesus' response to His mother's request seems a bit harsh. But the Greek word, translated *woman*, was a term of respect, used sometimes even of royalty. We have no English equivalent. The Spanish might use the word *doña*. The phrase, sometimes translated, "**What have I to do with thee,**" should rather be translated, "**What is there between you and Me?**" It is an old Hebrew expression which means, *We do not have anything in common in this particular matter*. It is not disrespectful or rude, but a matter of fact. Jesus was merely saying to His mother that she did not fully understand the implications of what she was asking Him to do. As it turns out, even though she probably did not know the full implications of the situation, she was no doubt prompted by the Holy Spirit. She pressed the matter further, and told the servants to do whatever Jesus asked them. There was something far more here than a mother's request for assistance from her son. The hour had indeed come and God was going to manifest His glory. He used this simple woman as an instrument in bringing about His will. Jesus Himself got the message and acted upon it.

There were sitting nearby six great stone water receptacles. They contained somewhere around twenty-five gallons apiece. They were used for the many kinds of washings that the Jewish law required. The Jews were obsessed with purifications. Hands had to be washed; feet had to be washed; utensils had to be washed; everything must be pure and clean. Jesus on occasion chided them for this because all of their washing could not purify their hearts. Perhaps this obsession was due to a legacy of guilt from hundreds of years of disobedience to God. Much of the water from these stone jars had been used up in the course of the feast. Jesus asked the servants to make sure that they were filled up with water. There would be no room for suspicion that the wine had been substituted as a hoax. If anyone should question, the servants would know that it was really water. When the jars had been filled, Jesus instructed the servants to draw out the water and serve it to the ruler of the feast. Somewhere in transit, or in the jars, the water had become wine; and the ruler of the feast, no doubt an expert, proclaimed it as the best wine that had yet been served. Again, the symbolism is important. From the simple things of life, God fulfills His eternal purpose. He uses what we have and what we are. Much of the reality of the relationship between man and God had been obscured by complicated religious ideas and forms. Jesus merely invited people to come to Him without terms and conditions. "*Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28).

This was the beginning of miracles. Thousands of suffering people would be the recipients of this miraculous power in the three years that were to follow. Many would believe on Him as a result of these miracles, and many would not. But deliverance at

last had come. God would be forever near,
and no one who wanted eternal life would
be turned away.

LESSON NINE

John 2:12-25

TRANSLATION

After this, He went down unto Capernaum; Himself and His mother and brothers and His disciples, and there He remained not many days.

And the Passover feast of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple, those who sold oxen and sheep and doves; and the money changers, sitting, and He made a whip out of ropes and cast them all out of the temple; and the sheep and oxen; and poured out the coins of the money changers and turned over the tables; and to those who were selling doves He said, “Take these things hence; do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” His disciples remembered that it was written of Him, “Intense concern for your house has consumed me.” The Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show us, that You do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “Forty-six years was this temple being built, and will you raise it up in three days?” But that One was speaking concerning the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus said. And as He was in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover, many believed on His name, while beholding Him with reference to the miracles which He was doing; but Jesus Himself did not commit Himself to them because He knew all things and He did not have need that any should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man.

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Temple Merchants

Jesus had just begun His work. His authority was verified by the miracle of the wine. He will soon need that authority. Shortly after the episode of the wedding feast, Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem to observe the Jewish feast of the Passover.

Approaching the great temple, He was infuriated to find that this sacred symbol of worship was overrun with screeching merchants and bawling beasts. In the following of temple rituals and sacrifices there were certain material matters that

had to be taken care of. If one did not have animals to sacrifice, they could be bought. If one did not have the half-shekel for the temple tax, his foreign coin could be exchanged at a small fee, of course. Jewish merchants were quick to take advantage of the situation. They began their merchandising outside the temple, but gradually had moved right into the court of the Gentiles. So accustomed had the people become to this chaotic condition, that there seemed nothing out of place about it. In many respects the entire system had become more a bother than a blessing. There was very little similarity between the original worship of God through sacred rituals and sacrifices and what now passed for the religious system of the day.

After man had fallen from his position with God, through disobedience, God had arranged that his position could be restored through the regular offering of animal sacrifices. The animal was to be a substitute in the penalty of death which had accompanied man's sin. In the Law of Moses there was a very extensive and well-defined series of sacred rituals that would guarantee to the heart of the faithful that their worship would be pleasing and acceptable to God. These ceremonial laws were ministered by priests who would stand as direct mediators between the worshiper and God. If somewhat involved and time consuming, it was nonetheless a beautiful system which allowed the worshiper to come in simple faith and be assured of God's favor. When in later centuries Israel turned from God to idolatrous practices, the entire system became not only unacceptable to God, but also extremely offensive to Him because it was practiced as a legal matter without faith. Chapters three through ten of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament outline the whole history of the failure of these ceremonial laws and the

ultimate replacement with the New Testament sacrifice of Christ. It would be well to read these chapters at this point.

As a result of Israel's disobedience and idolatry, she was taken into captivity by Babylon in about 587 B.C. From this time on, the original spirit of the sacrificial system was lost. From that time until the coming of Jesus there was a period of great darkness in Israel. During this period, when both Israel and its laws became almost extinct, there arose a religious leadership known as the Pharisees. The law of the Pharisees was not simply the Law of Moses, but that of the Talmud, which was an expansion of the original Law into such minute detail as to make of the law an instrument of intolerable bondage. It was the natural expression of a heart that had lost the spirit of the Law and was dependent upon human efforts to secure his favor with God. Of this law of the Pharisees, Jesus said, *"They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers"* (Matthew 23:4). Jesus likened these Pharisees to beautiful tombs with dead bones in them. *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whitened sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness"* (Matthew 23:27). Such was the condition of Jewish worship when Jesus entered the temple on that memorable day. The religious vacuum that had been left by the religion of the Pharisees, was quickly filled by all manner of human religious distortions. Thus it was that the profaning of this temple by turning it into an emporium was of little concern to the Jewish worshiper. The Spirit of God had been absent from their religious practice for so long, that they were no longer able to

distinguish the true from the false. A word must here be given to the followers of Christ today, His church. We must beware lest we fall into the same pattern. Sometimes today the simple realities of identity with Christ and the presence of His Holy Spirit within is obscured by the overwhelming amount of religious rituals and legalistic practices, and the following of humanly devised religious methods, rather than the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God seems to be replaced by human religious effort, and the Word of God is replaced by human ideology and methods.

Jesus lost no time in driving these pirates from the temple. His violent display was shocking to the fragile veneer of religious sensitivities that belonged to the Pharisees. Indignantly they challenged the authority of this young rebel and He silenced them with a penetrating response, which involved

a spiritual understanding of the meaning of the temple. So earthly and material was their understanding of the temple, that when Jesus spoke of a human temple—His own body—they were apparently so confused that they had nothing more to say to Him.

In the thirty years of His early life, Jesus was a keen observer of human nature. In His ministry He lost no time getting to the heart of things. He shattered the social and religious traditions behind which the deceitful human heart loved to hide. His call today, to all who would follow Him, is to come to the reality of simple faith in Him and to seek the power that comes from the presence of His Holy Spirit; and to avoid the philosophical and religious and social traditions which tend only to confuse and distort and leave the heart in bondage.

L E S S O N T E N

John 3:1-13

TRANSLATION

And there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher Who has come from God; for no one is able to do these miracles which You do except God be with Him.” Jesus said to him, “I tell you the absolute truth, except one be born again, he is not able to see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How is a man able to be born again being old? He is not able, is he, to enter into his mother’s womb a second time and to be born?” Jesus answered, “I tell you the absolute truth, except one be born of water and of the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, it is necessary for you to be born again. The wind blows where it will and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “You are a teacher of Israel and you do not know these things? I tell you the absolute truth that We speak what We know and We give testimony to what We have beheld, and you do not receive Our testimony. If I have spoken to you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? And no one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man.”

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Pharisee

A Pharisee came at night to talk with Jesus. His name was Nicodemus. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the powerful council which governed the religious practices of Israel. The Pharisees, as a group, had no use for Jesus. To them He was an ignorant young radical that was an embarrassing challenge to their authority. The Pharisees were specialists in the law—

not the simple Law of Moses delivered by God on Mount Sinai, but that nightmarish complexity of minute detail that emerged out of the Law of Moses. These laws were what Jesus referred to as the “tradition of the elders,” and had been accumulated over many centuries. They were later collected in documents known as the Talmuds. In the form in which they appeared during Jesus’

day, it would have been quite impossible for the common man to untangle the maze. Jesus was regarded as ignorant because He did not have special training in this law. As a matter of fact, He did have a considerable knowledge of it. Where He learned it, is not definitely known, but it was enough to cause some of the Pharisees who heard Him to marvel at Him and to exclaim, "How does this man know letters, having never learned." By "letters," they meant the sacred writings and as far as "learning" was concerned, since He did not learn in their official schools, in their mind He had not learned at all.

The penetrating knowledge that Jesus had of the Law, wherever He acquired it, was felt by the Pharisees on a number of occasions, when Jesus trapped them in their own words. They had to discredit Him in order to save face and so they refused Him as a legitimate teacher.

The authoritative attitude of the Pharisees in their judgment of Jesus, was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that they were relative latecomers to the role of religious leadership among the Jews. They rose to power along with another group called the Saducees, during the time of the Maccabees. The Macabees were the family that had overthrown the dreaded Antiochus Epiphanes back in the second century before Christ. The Pharisees, thus, had been self-styled custodians of the Law for less than 200 years. They had not been actually appointed by God, as had been the priests and Levites of the earlier centuries, but had rather risen to power in a political struggle. They filled the vacuum that had been left when God, according to His Word, had departed from Israel as a penalty for their disobedience and left them desolate for several hundred years. It was from this very darkness and desolation that Jesus

had come to deliver Israel. Jesus regarded these Pharisees as imposters and hirelings who cared not for the sheep (see John 10). Jesus was not overthrowing a system that had been ordained of God, but rather opposing the usurpers of religious leadership.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. To understand the full impact of his visit to Jesus, it is necessary to understand something of the meaning of the Pharisees and the godless legal system which they represented. For Nicodemus to come at night was imperative. For him to come at all was a miracle. A still greater miracle was that he should recognize Jesus as a teacher. His grounds for believing this were the miracles or signs which Jesus had done. To accept these signs as a proof was to put Nicodemus in quite a different category than the majority of the Pharisees, who in blind prejudice had set themselves to refuse Jesus at any cost. They were indeed agents of Satan hiding behind the mask of religious fervor. That is why Jesus so bitterly denounced them. He did not see them as seekers after truth, trying honestly, if somewhat skeptically, to determine if He was indeed the Messiah. Neither did He see them as misguided religionists who were a bit slow to understand. Rather, He saw them as a "generation of vipers," serpents who were out to destroy God's people. Thus the bitter conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was not merely a competition between alternative views of God. It was an extension of the great war that has raged between God and Satan from the beginning of time. A good analogy is the system of Marxian socialism (or Communism) which threatens to engulf the world today. Outwardly it appears to have the interests of humanity as its primary motive—promising equality and prosperity for the

world. In reality it is merely a power struggle by greedy men for world conquest. It is Napoleon with a benevolent mask.

Some of the Pharisees, apparently, were honest men seeking the truth. They were merely caught up in a system which appeared to be the mainstream of the Jewish faith of that day. Nicodemus, it seems, was one of these. The tone of Jesus' response to Nicodemus was quite different than in His encounter with the other Pharisees. Nicodemus had just made the remarkable confession that Jesus was a teacher sent from God. Jesus responded with a statement that was so penetrating that it caught Nicodemus completely off guard. "**Except one be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" He could hardly have made a more significant statement to a "ruler of the Jews." The mind of the Jews had been closed to the truth of God for hundreds of years. They had carried on their religious practices, but they were really empty rituals. The Spirit of God was not with them. The exception to this was a handful of Jewish people who were yet faithful to God's original covenant with them. As a nation, Israel had been struck with spiritual blindness (John 12). Usually when the Pharisees questioned Jesus, they were not interested in the truth, but in laying a trap for Him. Jesus was well aware of this and used these occasions to expose their hypocrisy. The fact that Jesus would make a serious effort to reveal the truth to Nicodemus shows the high regard that He had for him. Far from being a rebuke, Jesus' answer opened a door to him that had been sealed all of his life. Had the Spirit not already been working with Nicodemus, he could not have accepted Jesus as a teacher sent from God. Nicodemus did not himself understand this working of the Spirit. After all, he had been blind like his colleagues for a good part of

his life. Now Jesus will explain to him the meaning of the stirrings in his heart. Nicodemus had acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher. Now Jesus will teach him. The words that Nicodemus heard were undoubtedly the most important words that he had ever heard in his life.

Nicodemus the Pharisee, has become Nicodemus the disciple. He asks, "**How can a man be born when he is old? He is not able to enter into his mother's womb a second time and to be born is he?**" Nicodemus' question is not sarcastic. And Jesus' response is patient, but firm. He gives him a lesson on the subject of the Holy Spirit that he should have known a long time ago, as a religious leader. Religious leaders of today, who attempt to function without the Holy Spirit, will be as far from the truth as Nicodemus was. According to Luke 10:21, God has purposely hidden His truth from the "worldly-wise" and revealed it unto His children, newborn by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born both of water and of the Spirit. The water refers to the baptism of John. Jesus had Himself just recently been baptized by John, "in order to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus, as a man, was not above the requirements that God had made of His people. He would hardly have excluded Nicodemus from the same requirement. To consider the water here as reference to natural birth, would have required of His hearers a medical knowledge that they would not likely have had. On the other hand, to consider water here as representing the kind of baptism later practiced by the church, would not have been likely since Nicodemus could not have been expected to understand or to practice that kind of baptism prior to the historic coming of the Holy Spirit.

LESSON ELEVEN

John 3:1-13 (continued)

Nicodemus and the New Kingdom

When Jesus first responded to Nicodemus, He told him that he could not even *see* the kingdom of God without the Spirit. Now He goes further and tells him that he cannot *enter* that kingdom without the Spirit. What does it mean to enter the kingdom of God? There has been much confusion about the meaning of the kingdom of God, because of the effort to make it much more complicated than it was intended to be. The attempt to divide the kingdom into many different aspects is contrary to the simplicities of Jesus' teaching. After all, those whom Jesus numbers as His followers are not intended to be religious specialists, as were the Pharisees. Many of the competing religious systems are so complicated that they exclude any who are not capable of philosophical or abstract thought processes. Most religions are beyond the capacity of the average person. The way of redemption, if it is to be equally available to all, must be simple enough for even the illiterate to understand.

The most extensive teachings about the kingdom of God are given us by Jesus, Himself, in certain parables which are recorded in the Gospel (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8). A comparison of these passages will show that the expressions "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably. A detailed study of the word, "kingdom," cannot be undertaken here, but a study of the appropriate passages in the Bible will confirm the following general points:

1. There are three major uses of the word—the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdoms of this world.
2. The kingdom of God (also kingdom of heaven) has an Old Testament and a New Testament usage.
3. In the Old Testament, the kingdom of God referred to the nation of Israel, which was also sometimes referred to as "a kingdom of priests."
4. Entrance into the Old Testament kingdom of God was simply by being born naturally into the family of Israel. Hence, Jesus' comment to Nicodemus that there must now be a second birth, of the Spirit.
5. It was possible to be expelled from the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, as was the case when Israel disobeyed God and were cast out. This casting out of Israel was illustrated by Jesus in John 15 when He talked about cutting off the branches and casting them into the fire. It is further discussed by Paul in Romans 11 when he talks about the olive tree whose natural branch was cut off to make room for the new branch. The new branch was the new kingdom, or the body of Christ.
6. The New Testament kingdom was entered into, not by natural birth, but by a spiritual one. The New Testament kingdom of God, therefore, was open to all people on earth, Jew or Gentile. The Jew could no longer claim membership in the New Testament kingdom merely by birth. He also, like the Gentile, would have to enter in by being born again of the Spirit. The word Gentile, refers to everyone in the

world who is not a Jew. The Gentile was not included in God's original covenant with Israel. Now he too will be part of God's family by receiving the Holy Spirit into his own spirit.

7. The kingdom of God, then, is really the family of God, existing under two different covenants. The Old Testament (or Old Covenant) included, in the family of God, or the kingdom of God, all who by birth were part of Israel. Under the terms of the New Covenant, or New Testament. One becomes a member of the kingdom of God (or family of God) by receiving the Spirit of God into their hearts. This is what Jesus called being "born again." Nicodemus will have to be born again to enter into this new kingdom.

8. According to the parables which Jesus gave to His disciples, as reported in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the new kingdom will exist side by side with the world and with Satan's kingdom. In fact, there will be such an intermingling that only God, Himself, will be able to identify the members of each group.

9. God has a purpose for leaving on the earth those who become members of His kingdom. When He is finished with this purpose He shall bring to an end the system of life as we know it in this world. This is known as "the end of the age." At this time He and He alone will direct the separating of those who were members of His kingdom from those who were members of Satan's kingdom. The members of His kingdom will enter into eternal life and the members of Satan's kingdom will enter into eternal death.

10. The kingdom of Satan is mentioned in Matthew 12:26. "*And if Satan cast out Satan... how then shall his kingdom stand?*" The extent of that kingdom is given in Ephesians 2:1-2. "*And you being dead in your trespasses and your sins, in which then you walked according to the course of this*

world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who now energizes the children of disobedience." Jesus calls Satan "*the prince of the world*" (John 14:30). In Greek, the word "prince," is *archon*, which was applied to the chief ruler of the Greek city-state. (The English word prince, is usually used to refer to the heir to the throne). Jesus used the word, *archon*, identifying Satan as the chief ruler of this world. (For further study of Satan, the reader is referred to Isaiah 14, and Ezekiel 28. See also the author's pamphlet, *The Great War*.)

11. Both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan possess spiritual and earthly elements. It would not be correct to say that the kingdom of God was the spiritual kingdom and the kingdom of Satan was the earthly kingdom. In Ephesians 6:12, we read, "*Our wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers; against the authorities; against the cosmic powers of this darkness; against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" Spiritual forces, or psychic powers, are not all from God. Satan controls hosts of demons as God controls hosts of angels. In fact, the word "angel" is not only applied to messengers of God but also to messengers of evil. Satan, himself, is called "an angel of light." A very serious warning must be given in regard to the realm of the supernatural. Not everything that is supernatural, or miraculous, is from God. The Bible is the only safe guide through the treacherous spirit realm. Much destruction has been caused by the tendency to pursue special revelations and miracles from the supernatural realm. While one may pursue these very honestly, one must heed the warning that Satan has great powers in these areas and one must stay very close to the Word of God to avoid being deceived. Many people are not really seeking Christ, but religious experiences, spectacular

displays, and personal benefits such as healing and prosperity. The only safe course to follow is to seek Jesus Christ rather than spiritual power, and to test everything by the Word of God.

12. The kingdoms of this world at the present time are under the rule of Satan. After His baptism, Jesus had an encounter with Satan. At this time, Satan offered to give Him the kingdoms of the world. “Again, the devil took Him unto an exceedingly high mountain, and showed to Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to Him, ‘All these things will I give to You, if You fall down and worship me’” (Matthew 4:8). In the future all of these kingdoms of the world will belong to the triumphant Christ: “The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ [Anointed One], and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11: 15).

The foregoing discussion of the kingdom of God and its comparison with the kingdom of Satan, had to be given in order to acquaint the reader with the meaning of the offer which Jesus made to Nicodemus and to all who would subsequently be born again. Jesus did not have to explain the meaning of the phrase **kingdom of God**, to Nicodemus. But since Nicodemus only understood the Old Testament, Jesus had to give him the new application. What Jesus did have to explain to Nicodemus was the meaning of the Holy Spirit. Here, he was totally ignorant. Jesus does not spare Nicodemus the shame of his ignorance. That the “sheep of Israel” should wander in confusion and ignorance was understandable. For the teachers, or shepherds in Israel, to be in ignorance was inexcusable. As long as one keeps his ignorance to himself, God is sympathetic. When one imposes this ignorance on another and leads him astray, God reacts in

judgment: “*Therefore, Oh ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ‘thus saith the Lord God; behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore, for I will deliver my flock from their mouth that they may not be meat for them’*” (Ezekiel 34:9,10). In the New Testament, the same idea is given in James 3:1. “*Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment.*”

But now Nicodemus has come and Jesus has received him. Nicodemus will now be freed from the bondage of his ancient traditions. He will become a true teacher and shepherd in Israel, but he must be taught; Jesus continues His instruction. He explains that the Holy Spirit cannot be contained within the narrow framework of human laws and thought processes. The Spirit, like the wind, comes from beyond the region of human understanding, but His power is clearly felt in the lives of those whom He touches. When the Spirit touches the human heart it is made to see that Jesus is both the Son of Man and the Son of God, who has descended to the realm of man that He may also ascend back to His origin in the Godhead; bringing with Him the souls of those who have been released from the earthly prisonhouse of sin, having received the Spirit of God into their hearts. Nicodemus would have been familiar with the concept of the “Son of Man.” This phrase in the Old Testament was applied to the one whom the Old Testament prophets called, “the Messiah.” But, without the witness of the Holy Spirit, he would certainly not have identified Jesus with this “Son of Man.” The “**descending and ascending**” of the Son of Man is explained more fully by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “*Let this attitude of mind be in*

you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, thought it not something to be seized upon to be equal with God, but emptied Himself [of His position in the Godhead]; having taken upon Himself the form of a servant, having become in the likeness of men. And having been found in outward impression as a man, He made Himself lowly; becoming submissive unto death, even the death of the

cross. And for this reason God has highly exalted Him, and given to Him the name which is above every name in order that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, both of heavenly things and earthly things, and things of the underworld; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord unto the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

LESSON TWELVE

John 3:14-21

TRANSLATION

"And even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, in order that everyone who believes on Him may have eternal life. For thus God loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, in order that everyone who believes on Him may not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes on Him is not judged; but he who does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed on the name of the Only Begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world and men rather love the darkness than the Light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who makes a practice of evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light lest his deeds should be exposed; but he who performs [according to] the truth comes to the Light in order that his deeds may be manifested, that they are wrought in God."

COMMENTARY

Nicodemus and the New Redemption

To further clarify the history of the way of entry into the new kingdom, Jesus draws upon an Old Testament narrative. Nicodemus would certainly have been familiar with the story of the brass serpent from the records of the march of the children of Israel across the wilderness under Moses. It is not likely that he would have applied the meaning of it to the coming Messiah. Jesus gave him a lesson in typology. In Numbers 21, we have this story of the brass serpent. The people of God had at long last been delivered from the bondage in Egypt. They were making their way across the wilderness of Sinai to occupy the land of Canaan which God had promised to them. God had shown to them

His mighty power, first in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians and then in miraculous ways, providing for them in the wilderness. It should have been obvious to them, that a God who could provide for almost a half million people in the desert, would certainly be equal to any emergency or problem that would arise in their midst. But, in spite of all that God had done for them, and all the wonderful ways in which He had provided for their needs, they were continually grumbling and complaining about their lot. It was a rebellion against God that He could not long tolerate. As a penalty, He allowed them to be bitten by poisonous serpents.

In the treacherous wilderness they had been preserved from such things because of God's protection. We all live in a hostile world ruled over by our archenemy, Satan. Satan would destroy the people of God if he could, but God preserves His people by His power. Occasionally, in order to bring some kind of test, or discipline, God withdraws His hand for a moment, and allows Satan to have some effect upon His people. God Himself controls the extent of that adversity, so that it does not overwhelm us.

In this episode of the serpent, God had withdrawn His hand for a moment in order to reveal to the Israelites the seriousness of their rebellion against Him. When a number of the people had died from the serpents, they came to Moses and confessed their sin and wanted to be forgiven. God in His grace made provision for them. He instructed Moses to make a serpent out of brass and put it upon a pole so that all could see it. He decreed that as many as looked upon that serpent, would live. It was not, of course, that the serpent had any power within itself—it was only a symbol—but if one would respond to God's instruction by looking at the serpent, it was an indication that the person was indeed open to God and was repentant of their sins. Being thus repentant, God would forgive them and heal them. The entire episode is used as a type of redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The word "type" needs to be explained. In the Old Testament there were people and things and events that were used to symbolize the meaning of the coming of Christ, the Messiah. They were like object lessons, illustrating truths of God that might be difficult to grasp. Usually these "types" represented one facet of Christ's nature, while other facets were not necessarily applicable. For example, Moses

and David were both *types* of Christ. Moses was a type of Christ as a prophet, while David was a type of Christ as King. In fact, Jesus received His right to the throne through David. On the other hand there were certain aspects of the life of Moses and of David which were negative. These would not have applied to Christ. In addition to persons, there were also events, such as animal sacrifices and the ceremonies and rituals of the Old Testament Law. There were objects that were types of Christ, such as the tabernacle in the wilderness. A study of this tabernacle, will show that each of the parts of the tabernacle had some symbolism which depicted Christ. It is not possible to discuss this matter at this point. It will be taken up later in the commentaries. "Typology" is the study of these types. The book of Hebrews is the most complete presentation of these types. It would be well to read it at this point.

Jesus used this incident of the brass serpent to teach Nicodemus the meaning of Christ as God's answer to the problem of man's rebellion. Like many religious groups today, the Pharisees had little understanding of the meaning of sin. They were satisfied with, and even proud of, their brand of righteousness. Later, the apostle Paul, who had himself been a Pharisee, would reveal the ugliness of that self-righteousness (Philippians 3). It was a petty human effort at goodness; full of inconsistencies, ministering only to pride and false security. In the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus shows the shallowness of the human effort of these Pharisees. He shows that even if they keep their laws to the letter, their heart is so far from God as to require the power of God to deliver them. Human goodness can never satisfy the requirement of God's holiness. This was why Christ had come. Jesus, like the serpent, will have to

be lifted up for all the world to see the degradation of humanity. While the serpent was not itself a type of Christ; yet, on the other hand according to the Scripture when Christ was crucified—as He hung upon that tree, He had taken upon Himself the sins of man. Jesus, Who lived without sin, became for a moment the representative of the sins of the world. The brutality of Jesus' death upon the cross would show to mankind for all time the degradation of the human heart unleashing its fury upon the sinless Son of God. Those who stood by and accepted it as well as those who executed it would alike share God's judgment in this matter. Jesus thus prophesied to Nicodemus before any of His disciples, the means by which He would meet His death. Three years later, when Nicodemus would carry Jesus' body from the cross to bury Him, these words would no doubt ring in his ears.

The simplicity of God's redemptive plan was profound. He would provide His own sacrifice through a Son. Acceptance of that sacrifice, implying the admission of guilt and repentance, together with the receiving of that Son of God into the heart, would guarantee eternal life. If this seems too simple, remember that it was worthy of a mighty Redeemer. For redemption to be universally available and fair to all, it must be simple enough for the child; must cut across all language and culture barriers; must be available to the illiterate. Jesus said, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me." The cross of Christ overshadows the sin of the world. All who look upon it in repentance will have eternal life. No one in the world need be excluded.

And how would Nicodemus have understood Jesus' expression of God's love? In the Pharisaical system there was not one ounce of love expressed. Jesus had told the Pharisees that they "laid on the people

burdens grievous to be borne." No one thought of love when they thought of the Pharisees or their laws. Jesus did not have to explain the word to Nicodemus because He did not use the English word, "love," which is so ambiguous. The word that Jesus used was recorded by the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* is the word used throughout the New Testament to express the relationship between God and man. It is also used regarding one's attitudes toward others, even his enemies. When God says to love our enemies, this is the word that is used. This word does not involve the emotions, as in affection. Affection is expressed by the Greek word *phile*. It is very important to consider the difference between these two words. The word *agape* expresses something far deeper than any human emotion can ever express. It involves a very deep concern for others. It is an act of the will. It, implies a responsibility that goes beyond the changeable moods of emotion. God cared so much for the world that He took upon Himself the responsibility of seeing to its deliverance from the forces of evil into which it had fallen. If we do not understand the nature of God's caring, we may ascribe to Him sentimentality which would not be adequate to meet the needs of a lost world. Often times human sentimentality enters into our evaluation of what God is doing. God did not send His Son into the world to make us happy, nor to condemn us. He sent Him into the world to save us. But to save us from what? To save us from the evil that has consumed the world since man's disobedience, and alienation from God; to save us from eternal death; to save us from the prisonhouse of the space-time world and free us for the restoration of the glory which we originally were intended to share with God. Jesus came into the world to light its way back to God. Some prefer the darkness. God leaves the choice to them. But those

who choose the darkness cast their lot with the “Prince of Darkness” and his eternal

destiny of death.

LESSON THIRTEEN

John 3:22-36

TRANSLATION

After these things, Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea and He was staying there with them and He was baptizing. And John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there and [people] were drawing near and were being baptized; for John had not yet been cast into prison. There was then a questioning from the disciples of John with a Jew concerning, cleansing. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, concerning Whom you gave witness, behold this One is baptizing and all are coming to Him.” John answered and said, “A man is not able to receive anything except it be given to him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear witness that I said I am not the Christ but I have been sent before that One. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with great joy because of the voice of the bridegroom. This joy of mine then has been fulfilled. It is necessary for that One to increase, but for me to decrease. He who comes from above is above all things; he who is from the earth is of the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all things; for He has seen and heard, this He is witness to, and His witness no one receives. He who has received his witness has given a seal of confirmation that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit [to Him] without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes on the Son has eternal life; but he who disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the Wrath of God remains upon him.”

COMMENTARY

The Last Words of John the Baptist

John's work on earth is coming to an end. Soon he will be imprisoned by Herod and from his prison cell he will enter the gates of eternal glory. Before John leaves this wretched realm, its chief ruler, Satan, will make a last desperate bid for his soul. In

the process of redemption God had given to John a most important place. He had done his work well. In fact he had done it so well that Jesus was compelled to exclaim, "*There has not arisen among those born of women, a greater than John the Baptist*" (Matthew

11:11). Humanly speaking we would expect John's last days to be days of greater service and greater honor than ever. Instead, he will be tested to the breaking point. He will pass through the hardest ordeal of his life. The cruelty and injustice with which John was treated in these days was certainly worthy of his arch enemy, into whose hands he had fallen. The question is, "Why did God let His enemy have him?"

The detailed account of John's last ordeal is found in the other gospels, Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 9. The Jews of Galilee were ruled over by a tetrarch named Herod Antipas. He was a puppet of the Caesars. His position was precariously held at the caprice of the Roman government. The Herods, though Idumean in origin, had adopted the Jewish faith as a matter of convenience. Herod Antipas had long since sold out to the Caesars; maintaining the position of tetrarch under Rome called for craftiness, weakness and opportunism. Herod was well qualified. He was completely dominated by his venomous wife, Herodius, whom he had stolen from his brother Philip. The two deserved each other. Herodius was the epitome of evil in her selfish ambitions, which she ruthlessly pursued. This unholy pair reminds us of another dreadful duo in the days of the prophet Elijah; Ahab and Jezebel (I Kings 16-22). The reader is referred to the discussion of Elijah and John in the first chapter of this series. It is not without significance that John, the fulfillment of the type of Elijah, should be challenged by two such agents of Satan as Herod and Herodius. John had infuriated Herodius by turning the searchlight of truth upon her misdeeds.

Herodius will have her revenge. Apparently at her instigation, Herod had seized John

and thrown him into prison—rather a dungeon in the fortress of Machaerus. It was a deep, dark pit and he was kept there for about ten months. As Jesus would one day taste the darkness of death for the sins of mankind, so now John is swept by the darkness of doubt as he contends with the forces of Hell. He even wonders now if Jesus is indeed the Messiah; he sends his disciples to find out. Jesus can never be sympathetic with doubt. The battle is tough; the stakes are high. Jesus comforts John with hard, cold realism. He believes that His warrior is tough enough to take it. Jesus says to the disciples, "*Go and declare to John the things which you are hearing and seeing; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised and the poor evangelized; and blessed is he who ever shall not be offended in Me*" (Matthew 11:4-6). His answer was hard but His heart toward John was tender. When John's disciples have left, He turns to the crowd whom He had been addressing and lifts John up with the highest words of praise for a man that ever came from His lips. This is John's ultimate fulfillment. It is not the glory or the praise of itself. It is that the Master of the universe should be so completely satisfied with His servant. There is no goal on earth for which one can strive that matches the glory of God's approval. And, now comes Satan's final stroke. He will be rid of this menace once and for all. The battle has gone badly for Satan. Blow after blow by the stalwart soldier of God has found its mark. "*The gates of hell have not prevailed against him.*" Countless souls have come to repentance and the kingdom of God has been measurably strengthened. At last Satan has the chance to deal a mortal blow to this indomitable foe. He seizes upon the weakness and lechery of Herod and the viciousness of Herodius. At a great

anniversary feast Herod asks Herodius' daughter Salome to dance. So obsessed is his mind with evil desire that this sensual dance by a vulgar woman is worth to him, half a kingdom. Such was his offer to Salome. The evil influence of Herodius had reached a diabolical level. It is hard to imagine that a young woman would choose the grizzly head of a despised prophet over the marvels of anything that her heart desired up to half a kingdom. The choice had been her mother's. Herod was stunned; he had obviously not even imagined such a thing. It was a bad moment. In spite of the infuriating rebukes that he had received from John, he evidently had come to admire this fearless rebel, and heard him gladly. He was full of sorrow. Nevertheless, "On account of his oath, and those who reclined with him," he gave the awful command. He had chosen to reject loyalty to God and to truth and to honor, in favor of loyalty to a frivolous oath; and to the warped opinions of drunken companions both of which had been spawned in debauchery. This choice led Herod down the pathway to ruin. His mind now forever closed to the truth, he participated in the crucifixion of the Son of God, and died in disgrace; relieved of his throne and banished to Gaul.

And what of John? The last moment of his life was the crowning triumph of all. Far from being Satan's moment of triumph it was his moment of ultimate defeat. By his own hand he had released his enemy from the wretched prisonhouse of earth and swept him into eternal glory. The ordeal of John ended in the ultimate triumph over his enemy; but as in the case of Christ, the ultimate exaltation had to be preceded by complete humiliation. Let the reader see again Philippians 2:5-11. This brings us back to Aenon and to John's last words in his earthly ministry.

John's disciples were jealous of Jesus. After all, their master had been the focus of attention in the prophetic ministry that was bringing about a new spirit of repentance among the people of God. He [John] had contended with the Pharisees, valiantly, and blessed the heart of God's people; and moved fearlessly through the land, accomplishing his work. His disciples were understandably devoted to him and believed thoroughly in his ministry. Unfortunately they had been consumed with the work itself and had forgotten the ultimate meaning of the work. And so it was that they came to John, complaining that "This One" (they would not even mention His name) was drawing everyone after Him. Everything they had worked for was slipping away. But John had not lost the vision. He reminds his disciples that they have nothing apart from God. He had promised them nothing. He had admitted from the beginning that he was not the true Anointed One that was to come. It was obvious that much of their devotion had been to John, not to God, else they would have been more concerned about God's purposes in the matter. John explains again to them, most patiently, that he is after all only the friend of the Bridegroom and not the Bridegroom Himself. His whole purpose is to aid the Bridegroom and to rejoice with Him. His own joy is fulfilled in the Bridegroom.

The concept of the church as the bride of Christ is here introduced. Jesus declared the truths of God in simple figures of speech and parables and allegories so that all might understand. The symbols that Jesus used cut across the barriers of language and culture and time and intellect. One does not have to be a philosopher or even know how to read to understand these truths. He describes man's relationship to God in terms of sheep and shepherd; trunk and

branch; vineyard and farmer; building and builder; body and head; and bride and groom. Through these figures of speech we understand that our relationship to God is not a distant and impersonal one. God is not merely a universal force nor an invisible tyrant. The whole purpose of Christ's coming to earth in the form of Jesus was to bring God near to man. He has made Himself accessible to all who desire to be with Him. Thus, John's use of the symbolism of bride and groom is an insight into a relationship between God and His people which will be fulfilled only after the

resurrection of Christ and the coming of His Holy Spirit.

At this point John sees himself only as the friend of the Bridegroom. The relationship of bride and groom will not be something that he will participate in on this earth. It would occur after his death. John thus joins a large company of faithful ones spoken of in Hebrews 11:13: "*These all died in the context of faith not having obtained the promises, but having seen them afar off and having embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.*" For this hope John would die.

LESSON FOURTEEN

John 3:22-36 (continued)

John's Last Agony—Flesh versus Spirit

If God loved the world why then did He allow this faithful servant of His, the herald of His love, to suffer so at the conclusion of his life? Altogether John lived a hard and sacrificial life. He apparently had very little or nothing for himself all the days that he was on the earth, and in the end he suffered miserably at the hand of his enemy. To make matters worse his final death was at the caprice of a sensuous dancing girl. All of this was in keeping with the deepest meaning of God's message to man. John the Baptist became an object lesson to the world. "*That which is of the flesh is flesh; that which is of the Spirit is Spirit.*" "*The flesh has its desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary one to another so that you cannot do the things you would*" (Galatians 5:17). "*Love not the world neither the things that are in the world ... because everything that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the empty glory of this life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away and the desires of it; but he that does the will of God remains forever*" (I John 2:15-17). God is trying to teach man that only the things that partake of the nature of the spirit and of Himself will abide. If God is trying to teach man that the important things are the things of the spirit, then it hardly seems consistent that He would put His attention to trying to make life easy or pleasant in the flesh.

A word of explanation is here necessary. In the Bible, the word *flesh* usually refers to natural processes of life including the body and the mind. The word *spirit* refers to that part of man that is occupied by God. The spirit governs the natural processes, or the flesh. When that spirit is filled with Christ our attitudes toward the things of this life are those of Christ. When Christ does not occupy our spirit then our attitudes will either be of the natural world, or even of Satan. The Bible indicates a difference between *soul* and spirit (see Hebrews 4:12 and I Thessalonians 5:23). The soul includes the natural functions of the mind—intellect, feeling, will. Many times people confuse the emotional experiences which are of the mind with experiences that are of the Spirit of Christ. When the Spirit of Christ addresses our spirit, there is a deep conviction that the Spirit is speaking to us; but when our experiences are of the flesh they are usually surface emotions. They are not lasting and there is often even a question in the mind of the person as to whether it was really God or not. Understanding the difference between the flesh and the spirit or the mind and the spirit is very important in order to understand what was happening to John the Baptist. It is also important for us to know in order to understand what God is doing with us in our own private lives. Many of God's children have suffered brutally in this world, but the suffering only serves to strengthen the spirit. The apostle Paul often used athletic competition as an

illustration of the life of a Christian (I Corinthians 9:25). He points out that if one wants to be a winner, he must be willing to forego many of his natural desires in order to better fit himself for the contest. He chooses the joy of victory over the temporary pleasures of his natural flesh. Just so, those who wish to strengthen the spirit in preparation for their eternal life with God, must not expect an easy life on the earth. It is not that we must completely ignore the flesh, but rather that we must hold it in the right perspective.

As far as life on this earth was concerned, John had a hard time. But his reward in terms of the spirit was great. It is not that everything in the flesh is bad. After all God has made this world. We are certainly free as Christians, to enjoy many things on this earth, but we must be moderate about these things and we must not put any dependence upon them. If God sees fit to allow suffering in our lives for the sake of some spiritual growth, then we must accept it willingly. Paul said to the Romans, “*If indeed we suffer together then also we may be glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is about to be revealed in us*” (Romans 8:17, 18).

As Christians we must understand that we are living in a world that is hostile to God and to us. The Bible tells us that we can expect in this world much tribulation. The only way that we will be protected from this tribulation is by the presence of Christ in us and around us. To go in this world without Christ is as absurd as to go into the depths of the ocean without diving equipment. Jesus said, “*These things have I spoken unto you that in Me you might have peace. In the world you have affliction; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” The word translated “affliction,” is the Greek word

which means “pressure.” A submarine is able to go to the depths to the ocean because it is so constructed that the pressure from without is equalized by pressure within; otherwise the vessel would be crushed by the tremendous pressure of the ocean. The Christian survives the pressures of this world because the presence of Christ within equalizes the pressure without. God allows us to exist in this hostile environment because our spirits need to be strengthened, and because it is to His divine glory to illustrate to the world that He is able to keep us by His divine power. But it is important to understand that He never lets Satan affect us beyond our capacity to bear it. The great illustration of this is Job in the Old Testament. God allowed Satan to afflict Job almost beyond his endurance. But Job was able to endure and God did ultimately lift the affliction and bless the latter days of his life abundantly. It would thus be completely contradictory to God’s purposes on the earth if He prevented us from having to suffer affliction. It is not always His will to heal or to solve problems for us immediately. It is not always His will to come to our aid so we don’t have to suffer. It is often important to us to feel the impact of the hostile forces that are around us.

We have gone deeply into this matter of the flesh and spirit and of affliction and the problem of pain, because it is essential to understand what it was that God was doing in the life of John the Baptist when He allowed his enemy to have him. The crowning insult to Satan was when God let Satan’s evil agent, Herodius, have John’s body. To illustrate this point let us suppose that you have a very beautiful jewel chest. You have an enemy who has long admired this possession of yours and contrives to steal it from you. One day you notice him lurking by your house and you know that he

wants to steal your possession. Inside this jewel box is a pearl of great worth, but your enemy does not know that. You slip the pearl out of this jewel box and hide it and then you make it easy for the enemy to steal the box. Your enemy is elated. At last he has robbed you of your treasure, or so he thinks. But later on he discovers that the thing of real value in the chest was the pearl and that you had tricked him and mocked him by letting him steal the box and miss the pearl. God gave to Satan the body of John the Baptist that his spirit might be released to eternal glory.

John is dead; but his spirit and his words have been living for nearly two thousand years. His last words spoken on earth in his public ministry brought into sharp focus the central and basic truths of the meaning of Jesus Christ. Jesus came as a witness from God. Some received His witness and some did not. As Herod had the choice to hear

John or kill him, so all men have the choice to listen to the words of Jesus or participate in His crucifixion. To reject Jesus is to reject the truth of God. The truth of God is absolute reality. To reject that truth is to reject all that is real in the universe. God projected Himself into the world through Jesus, His Son. So directly was Jesus the vehicle or vessel of the Spirit of God that it could be said of Him that God had given to Him His Spirit in such unlimited abundance that it cannot be measured. The love that God has for the world He projects through the Son. Everything that belongs to God, belongs also to the Son—the world, the universe, and the souls of men. He who believes on the Son to the point of receiving Him receives also His eternal life; but he who rejects the Son remains unto that judgment of God from which the Son had come to set them free.

LESSON FIFTEEN

John 4:1-30

TRANSLATION

As then the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, (although indeed Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples,) He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And it was necessary for Him to pass through Samaria. He came then unto the city of Samaria called Sychar, near the region which Jacob had given to his son, Joseph. And there was there the well of Jacob. Jesus then, exhausted from the journey, was sitting thus upon the well; it was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me to drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city in order that they might buy food. The Samaritan woman said to Him then, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For the Jews do not associate with the Samaritans." Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the free gift of God, and Who it is that says to you, 'Give Me to drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You do not even have anything to draw with and the well is deep; whence then do You have the living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob are You, who gave the well to us, and he himself drank of it, and his sons and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever will drink of the water which I will give him, will not thirst forever, but the water which I will give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw." He said to her, "Go call your husband and come here." The woman answered and said, "I do not have a husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I do not have a husband;' for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; you have spoken this truthfully." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I behold that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and You say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship." Jesus said to her, "Believe Me, woman, that the hour comes when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we know what we worship, because salvation is of the Jews; but the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall

worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for also the Father seeketh such who worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that the Messiah comes, who is called the Christ; whenever that One comes He will proclaim to us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

And at this time His disciples came, and were marveling that He was speaking with a woman; yet indeed no one said, "What are You seeking or why are You speaking with her?" The woman then left her water jar and went away into the city, and said to the men, "Come see a man who told me all things that I have done. This is not indeed the Christ, is it?" They came out of the city and were coming to Him.

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

One by one, the Man called Jesus was touching the needy of the earth with the Spirit of God. His great compassionate heart had reached out to the rugged fisherman, the simple Israelite and the highbrow religious statesman. Now He must go to the lowly woman of Samaria. The need to go through Samaria was a shaft of glory from God. The Greek expression used here implies moral obligation rather than circumstantial. It had nothing to do with the distance traveled; nor convenience; nor political symbolism. It had to do with some lost sheep and the needy heart of a simple woman. In the eyes of Jew and Gentile alike she was a "nothing." She was a "nothing" woman in a "nowhere" land, and Jesus must go to her. Samaria had been the once noble capital of an ignoble country. It had been the seat of power of the northern ten tribes of Israel—a nation that had been hatched in rebellion and governed in complete independence from God. It was a rupture in the unity of God's chosen people. God had taken some wandering nomads

and made them His own people. The entire substance and purpose of their existence was the unity that they had with God. They were not just another nation, they were God's own people, His family on earth. They were the oracle through whom God would make known His power to the world and His love. They were to make known the incredible truth that **God loved the world**. Not content to be His people and His prophets, they had set out in pursuit of earthly glory. Forgetting the meaning and glory of their place with God they sought instead the glory of man. In a process of rebellion and idolatry, the nation reached its zenith in the reign of Solomon and became a synonym for splendor. Their moral and spiritual decay, hidden under a gilded facade, they became totally disarmed in the camp of the enemy and came to grief under the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. So harsh was Rehoboam's treatment of the people that a large number of them decided to withdraw from the kingdom and form their own nation. The road to earthly glory was a road to spiritual

ruin and the splendor of Solomon's kingdom ended in the wretchedness of a rebellious son. The new nation that was formed was composed of the ten northern tribes of Israel. Hereafter they would be known as "Israel," while the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin would be known simply as "Judah." In spite of the intolerable nature of the situation, God had not intended that these northern should leave the fold. Accordingly, the continuity of divine presence was with Judah. Judah was by no means perfect, but in the course of its history there were several revivals (under Hezekiah and Josiah, for example—II Kings 18 and 22). God continued with them His purposes on the earth. The ten

northern tribes were launched under the rule of Jeroboam. His first official act was to make two golden calves as a replacement for the God of their fathers. Born in idolatry, the nation would die in oblivion two centuries later. The ten tribes that made up the nation are known to this day as "the lost tribes of Israel." In 721 B.C., Samaria, the capital of Israel, fell under the siege of Sargon II of Assyria. The people of Samaria were taken away captive and, the city was repopulated with foreigners or "Gentiles." Samaria now became known as "Galilee of the Gentiles." Today, ancient Samaria lies in complete desolation—the fulfillment of the prophecy of Hosea (13:16).

LESSON SIXTEEN

John 4:1-30 (continued)

The Personal Encounter and the Power of the Spirit

Into this darkness and desolation came Jesus. The Light of the World must also touch the Samaritans—**Galilee of the Gentiles, who sat in great darkness** (Matthew 4:13-16). (Note: the same pattern was followed by the Apostles after Pentecost—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the Gentiles beyond). As with the wandering nomads whom God chose to represent Him in the world, and the simple fishermen whom Jesus chose as His disciples, He will reach out to the Samaritans through the least likely of all oracles. And so comes Jesus to Sychar. The ancient rivalries between the Jews and the Samaritans far exceeded the racism of today. The Jew would not even pass through the land of the Samaritan. To avoid it, he would cross over the Jordan and travel up its eastern bank to the region of Galilee. Jesus went straight through Samaria. He had an appointment with His people.

Jesus had traveled about twenty miles and He was exhausted. He came to the well of Jacob, a striking symbol that this land, too, had once been under God's covenant. A woman came to draw from it; it was still supplying refreshing to the body, if refreshing for the soul had long since evaporated from that land in the drought of disobedience. The Restorer of souls has come at last. Jesus said to her, "**Give Me to drink.**" These four words were the most significant words that had been spoken in the land of Samaria for a thousand years.

The idolatry of Jeroboam had brought a silence from God that was not to be broken until the very Son of God addressed Himself to this simple woman at the well. From this moment there would begin a flow of the water of life that would reach its fulfillment in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Samaritans would not be excluded from the limitless grace of God.

The greatest miracle of all of Jesus' ministry was the revelation of the grace of God to the people of earth. We catch the spirit of this in the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well. In the first place she was a Samaritan; **and the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.** The impenetrable barriers between Jews and Samaritans were centuries old. The Jews would not even walk through their land. In the second place, she was a woman. The men of Jesus' time did not converse with women. Throughout the Middle East women were often regarded as a property, or possession. In the third place, she was a woman of questionable character. Jesus knew it even before He questioned her. None of these things mattered to Jesus; she was a lost sheep in need of a shepherd, and there were more where she came from. Jesus' request for water opened the conversation. Water is a universal need. In fact, there is no more basic need to the human body. One may go many days without food, but going without water is fatal. If water is one of the most vital needs of the body it is also one most simply met if

there is a source. Jesus will use this analogy to introduce life, not only to this woman, but also to her village and to all of Samaria. **“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall not thirst forever, but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.”** Throughout all of Scripture, water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. **“On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes on Me, even as the Scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ And this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who have believed on Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified”** (John 7:37-39). Receiving the Holy Spirit is as simple as drinking from a river of water. The eternal God becomes the endless source of life to all who will receive it. Jesus’ statement in John 7 regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit will be explained later, but briefly stated, it meant that after Jesus would rise from the dead, He would then send His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of men and minister to them in place of His physical presence.

Jesus’ offer to the woman at the well was simple, yet profound, quite beyond her power to understand. He did not discuss with her at all the whole issue of the Holy Spirit, and yet somehow she sensed that He had made an unusual offer. Whereas before she was skeptical because she did not know how He could ever draw water from so deep a well without a vessel, now she asks Him for the water without hesitation. Certainly, she still is thinking in terms of physical water and yet apparently the light is beginning to dawn.

Jesus made no conditions for her receiving this water beyond asking for it. Jesus’ exposure of her private life was neither a condition of salvation nor a condemnation of sin, but rather a confirmation of His power; this, the woman immediately grasped. She perceived that He was a prophet, and the physical water was completely forgotten. Her thoughts having now been turned to matters of the spirit, she posed a theological question—in fact, the crucial question which had separated the Jews and the Samaritans for several centuries. “Should we worship at Jerusalem, or on Mount Gerazim?” When the Jews had returned from captivity to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, the inhabitants of the land of Samaria (now made up of a mixture of Gentiles), offered to help rebuild the temple. The offer was refused by the Jews for several very important reasons (which we cannot go into now) and the Samaritans, offended, set about to build their own temple on Mount Gerazim. Such a question would have set the Pharisees to arguing for hours, but Jesus, as always, kept His priorities straight. Ministering to this woman’s spirit was more important than winning an argument. Refusing to be drawn into an unprofitable discussion, Jesus merely reminds the woman that salvation had originally come from the Jews and that knowledge of worship would have come through them as well. He went on then to the more vital issue of the spirit. “God is a Spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth.” Jesus’ words did not offend the woman, but rather drew her thoughts to the Messiah. This, of course, was what Jesus had been trying to do all along. She was ready now for His declaration that He Himself was indeed the Messiah. So masterfully had the Spirit opened the heart of this woman that she went back to her village with the conviction

that she surely must have been talking to the Messiah.

Jesus' offer to the woman at the well had been a genuine one. She was invited to ask for the living water. She asked.

Immediately the Spirit had begun a work in her heart and brought her to the place where she had been able to understand and receive the truth that this Jesus, who sat before her upon a well, was indeed the Messiah.

LESSON SEVENTEEN

John 4:31-42

TRANSLATION

Meanwhile the disciples were begging Him, saying, “Master, eat.” And He said to them, “I have food to eat which you do not know of.” The disciples were saying to one another, “No one has brought Him anything to eat, have they?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘that there are yet four months and the harvest comes?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and behold the fields, that they are white to harvest. He who reaps already receives reward and gathers together fruit unto eternal life, in order that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. In this matter the word is true that there is one who sows and another who reaps. I have sent you to reap that for which you have not labored. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

And out of that city many of the Samaritans believed on Him on account of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all things that I have done.” As then the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to remain with them; and He remained there two days. And many more believed on account of His word and they were saying to the woman, “We no longer believe on account of your word; for we ourselves have heard and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

COMMENTARY

The Desolate Land Gets an Early Harvest

Samaria had been in darkness for several centuries. Her darkness and desolation had been prophesied by Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah (about 750 B.C.). His prophecies regarding Samaria and the northern tribes of Israel are very similar to Isaiah's prophecies concerning Judah, though much briefer. Because of her idolatries and iniquities, Samaria will be overrun by the Gentiles. She will be brought to darkness

and desolation. In the end, the mercy of God will prevail and she will be restored. Jesus had to come to Samaria because there was a prophecy to fulfill. Now Jesus sits upon the well of Jacob; no doubt contemplating the entire matter. The disciples return with food for Him. He is not hungry. His mind is filled with something more than food. There is a harvest to reap in a desolate land. Perhaps the prophecy of Micah was in His

mind. “**Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but thou shalt not drink wine**” (Micah 6:15). The disciples begged Jesus to eat. Consumed with the urgency of His task, He responds, “**My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me and to bring to completion His work.**”

Seed time and harvest were familiar seasons to the disciples. Jesus gives a new dimension to them. As He had once told them that He would make of them “**fishers of men,**” so now He introduces them to the concept of the harvest of souls. The harvest of grain must wait, but the harvest of souls has already begun.

From the village of Sychar comes a stream of hungry Samaritans. The long drought has ended. The word of God has fallen like rain upon their ears, and the harvest is ready. Sower and harvester will rejoice together. Moses and the prophets had sown; centuries later, Jesus and the disciples will reap. The redemptive plan of God, begun on that fatal day of judgment in the paradise of God, has spanned the thousands of years of human history. None will escape the sentence of death; just as none will be excluded in the sweep of divine mercy. Jew and Gentile; Samaritan and sinner—all will confront, in one way or another, the truth of God.

As the well of Jacob was deep, and the water a long way down; so the Samaritans were a long way from the refreshing of God. But Jesus did indeed have something to draw with—the Spirit of God. He did reach the heart of the Samaritan. They came to Him and asked for the living water, and their hearts—awakened thus by the Holy Spirit—cried out, “We know that this is

truly the Savior of the world.” After Christ rose from the dead and His Holy Spirit had returned on the day of Pentecost, Philip was sent to the Samaritans to bring to them the further revelation of the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan. Then came the apostles, fresh from Jerusalem and the wonders of the day of Pentecost. Laying hands on them they prayed with them and that blessed Holy Spirit who had first awakened their hearts at the well, came to dwell with them forever.

To understand the historic as well as spiritual significance of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritans, is most important for a complete knowledge of God’s redemptive plan. But of far greater importance is the significance of this episode at the well for the understanding of one’s personal redemption and identification with Jesus Christ. The key to both is the analogy of the well. Jesus Christ, today, offers the same **Water of Life** in the same simple way.

The heart of man is a dry and thirsty land filled with futility, disillusionment and frustration. The earthly goals and fascinations that are available do not satisfy. Human philosophies are a barren wasteland; human entertainments are a jungleland of peril; human ambitions are a wilderness of disillusionment. Human beings, created by God, can only find satisfaction by drinking at the well of His Holy Spirit.

In practical terms, to drink the **Water of Life**, means to ask Christ to come into the heart by His Holy Spirit and dwell there. As surely as He opened the hearts of the Samaritans to believe on Him, so He will open the heart of anyone who comes to Him. And, as with the Samaritans, He makes no prior conditions. Till He comes to us we do not have the Spirit and if we do not have

the Spirit it is impossible to fulfill any condition. It is impossible to understand the truth; it is impossible to understand sin; it is impossible to repent from sin; and it is impossible to be humble before God to receive His salvation. It is therefore necessary for one to receive the Holy Spirit before he can participate in any of the

spiritual processes that relate to his salvation. The only requirement to receive the refreshing waters of the Spirit of Christ into the heart is to ask. Jesus Christ Himself gives the invitation—**“If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink.”**

LESSON EIGHTEEN

John 4:43-54

TRANSLATION

And after two days, He went out from there unto Galilee. For Jesus Himself gave witness that a prophet does not have honor in his own country. When He came then into Galilee, the Galilaens received Him, having beheld all things whatsoever He had done in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves had come unto the feast.

He then came again unto Cana of Galilee, where He had made the water into wine. And there was a certain royal officer whose son was sick in Capernaum. This one having heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, went away to Him and asked that He come down and heal his son; for he was about to die. Jesus then said to him, “If you do not see signs and wonders, you will not believe at all.” The royal officer said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go, your son lives.” The man believed the word which Jesus said to him, and he went. While he was yet going down, his servants met him saying that his child lived. He inquired from them then the hour in which he had improved. They said to him then, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” The father then knew that it was that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives;” and he himself believed and his whole house. Again this second miracle Jesus did when He had come up out of Judea into Galilee.

COMMENTARY

The Human Family vs. the Family of God

Jesus had spent two days in Sychar ministering to the eager Samaritans. The Holy Spirit had so deeply affected their hearts that a groundwork was laid which would enable them to participate in that glorious outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. They would be swept along in the flood tide that meant the beginning of the restoration of God's people (see Acts 8).

Now Jesus heads northward toward Cana of Galilee, where He had performed that miracle of the wine that initiated His public ministry. As He passed through the region of Nazareth, He was led to remark to His disciples that **a prophet does not have honor in his own country**. The river of the Divine Spirit had flowed through Jesus in great abundance, touching the needy and the afflicted everywhere; but among His

own people—family, friends, townspeople—He was not appreciated. In fact, at one point, many of them tried to kill Him. It was an extremely important object lesson. Earthly relationships are transient and undependable. The spiritual family is the only ongoing, eternal reality. Ultimately all blood ties will give way and be replaced by ties that are in the Spirit of Christ. The division is going to be in terms of those who are members of the body or family of Christ, and those who are not. Therefore we must see our relationship to Christ and His family as taking priority over the earthly family, wherever the interests of both come in conflict. Jesus Himself, facing such a choice, said, **“Who is My mother, and who are My brothers? And He stretched His hand over His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brothers; for whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, this one is My brother and sister and mother”** (Matthew 12:48-50). Jesus was never

disrespectful to His mother and He obviously cared for her. When He was hanging on the cross He saw to her needs by putting her in the care of John; however, He never let family interests interfere with what He knew to be the will of God. Later when some young men wanted to follow Jesus, but first wanted permission to tend to some family matters, He would not allow it. He was well aware of the fact that Satan has often used family matters to hinder people from doing the will of God. A family can be a wonderful thing when it is in harmony with the purposes of God. It can be a citadel—a fortress of faith in the midst of a satanic world. It can be a source of strength and encouragement and support to each of its members in their efforts to grow and to follow Christ. But when Christ is not the center of the home it becomes a powerful weapon of Satan to discourage and dishearten and destroy those who, within that family, are trying to follow Christ.

LESSON NINETEEN

John 4:43-54 (continued)

A Desperate Father and a Sick Son

Jesus had arrived in Cana of Galilee. His dynamic personal encounters with the various streams of society continue. From the simple Samaritan, He shifts now to the ranks of royalty. An officer of the king's court is desperate. He has a son who is dying. Wretchedness and misery are not confined to the poor. In fact, sometimes misery is less painful to the poor because they are accustomed to it; they have learned not to expect too much out of life. In desperation, this Courtier from Capernaum had come to Cana to seek out Jesus, not because he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but because he was desperate and he had heard that this "Rabbi" could do cures. The Talmuds record incidents of healing by the Rabbis, and so it was not an uncommon thing for people to attribute such powers to them. When he asked Jesus to come down to his house, it was evident that he saw Him simply as another "worker of cures," whose presence would have been required on the scene. This is in sharp contrast to another episode where a centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant, urging Him not to come down but merely to speak the word. For this one Jesus had a considerable word of praise concerning his faith (see Matthew 8). (Note: these two narratives are not referring to the same incident. The one was a centurion meeting Jesus in Capernaum. This incident concerns a royal officer, who came to Cana).

With the faith of the royal officer, Jesus was not impressed. Apart from a dynamic and

personal interaction with Jesus Christ, the whole idea of faith is superficial and foolish. Faith without an object is useless. One often hears people who are not Christians making the statement, "You must have faith." The big question, of course, is "faith in what?" We cannot have absolute faith in ourselves. To think that any human being is going to be adequate for every circumstance in life that comes along is absurd. To believe in the world—that one can trust that "somehow everything will work out all right," is equally absurd; and the facts of life simply do not sustain this idea. To believe generally, that there is some kind of God in the heavens who dispenses goodness to all His creatures of earth irrespective of their own commitment or conduct is a fairy tale. Evidently the faith of the Courtier was of this general variety—enough to get him from Capernaum to Cana, but not enough to bring him into a personal identification with Jesus. The inadequacy of the man's faith was reflected in Jesus' response, "**If you do not see signs and wonders, you will not believe at all.**" The indifference of the Courtier to the issue of his personal interaction with Jesus is indicated by the fact that he did not interact with Jesus on the subject at all, but urged greater haste on the part of Jesus to come down before his child would die.

The most remarkable thing here is that Jesus made no further demands on the man, but instantly spoke the word of

healing. This was, of course, in keeping with the spirit of Jesus' ministry from the beginning. He healed many thousands of people. On occasion we are told that **He healed all that came to Him.** There is no evidence that He demanded of these ones whom He healed any precondition of faith. Wherever He did challenge their faith it was more to emphasize the inadequacy of that faith than to demand it as a condition of healing. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, bringing the faith of Christ into the heart, it could not have been expected that anyone had enough faith. The same was true of the "Sermon on the Mount." The "Sermon on the Mount" was not intended as a basic standard of morality for all to follow, but rather, a demonstration that no amount of human righteousness was adequate to meet the standard of God. No matter how well one might discipline his will power and keep the Law outwardly, he could not possibly control his inner spirit. Thus it was necessary for God to send His Spirit to occupy the hearts of men. Had anyone been able to come forward and honestly admit to having fulfilled the conditions of the "Sermon on the Mount," then there would have been no necessity for Christ to die. God would merely have demanded conformity to the Law by the discipline of the will. Paul considered himself to have been blameless as far as the Law was concerned, but he admitted that his righteousness was not good enough. In fact, in comparison to the righteousness of Christ, he felt that it was nothing but refuse. He saw that only the righteousness of Christ could fully satisfy the requirement of God, and so he quit trying to establish his own righteousness, which was of the Law, and took upon him the righteousness of Christ by faith. This righteousness he found could only come by the presence of Christ within (see Philippians 3).

The purpose of the foregoing discussion was to show that neither faith nor righteousness as a religious exercise of the natural mind is adequate to fulfill God's requirement. It was not possible for these people who were healed by Jesus to have possessed enough faith to merit the healing power of Jesus. The healing was purely an expression of divine grace. True faith and true righteousness can only come through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

The royal officer had come to Jesus without adequate faith. The basis upon which he came was unsound. But he came, and that was the important thing. Whatever was true of his attitude and the condition of his faith, the confrontation with Jesus changed him and he would never be the same again. A miracle had come to his own heart, and now he believed even before he saw the wonder of the healing. How precious the victory, when the heart comes to peace before the problem is solved. Then it is that we express true faith—faith in Christ and not in the changing of the circumstances. The moment Jesus spoke, the fever left the lad. The father did not know this for yet another day. The moment our request is received by Christ He applies to it His gracious attention and power. Whatever it is that He intends to do about it will have been initiated, but we may not see the results for some time. That is why our faith must be in Christ and not in our expectations of what He is going to do. Such faith can only come with the coming of Christ into our hearts; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The touch of Christ upon this officer of the king's court had brought him from the place of a half-hearted hope in a rabbinic healer to a faith in Jesus as the Son of God. So powerful was this faith that it transformed **all his house.**

LESSON TWENTY

John 5:1-9

TRANSLATION

After these things, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up unto Jerusalem. And there was in Jerusalem at the sheep gate, a pool, which is called in Aramaic, “Bethesda,” which had five covered porches. In these there were sitting a multitude of the sick; the blind; the lame; the withered. And there was a certain man who had been there thirty-eight years in his sickness. Jesus, having seen this one reclining and knowing that he had already been there for a long time, said to him, “Are you willing to be whole?” The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I do not have a man that when the water is troubled, will cast me into the pool; but while I am coming, another goes down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Arise, take up your pallet and walk.” And immediately the man was whole, and he took up his pallet and walked.

COMMENTARY

Jesus at the “Pool of Mercy”

Another feast at Jerusalem, and Jesus must be there. The Spirit of God had long been absent from the sacred ceremonies and festivals of His people, but now, according to His promise He has come near once more in the presence of Jesus. This was by no means the full restoration of Israel; it was only the beginning. Once more God's grace would be despised by His people; His promised Messiah would be rejected and crucified; His people would go through yet more centuries of wretchedness and rebellion until at long last, beaten and helpless, they will say, **“Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.”** Meanwhile, the kingdom of God has drawn near; and the King walks among His people, seen only by the eyes of those whose hearts have been prepared for Him.

Continually the very Son of God is at their feasts, and daily in their synagogues. Some see Him, receive Him, and rejoice. Some have their eyes opened by the miracles which He performs. But the majority of the Jews, senses dulled by the deceptive leadership of the Pharisees, reject Him in spite of the miracles, and will soon participate in His crucifixion. But who are they who receive Him? What are they like? Let us go to the “Pool of Mercy” and see.

In Jerusalem, by the sheep gate, was a pool called Bethesda. Its name means “House of Mercy. It had five covered porches where languished large numbers of wretched souls whose hopeless physical condition had brought them here in desperation to seek a “miracle cure.” It was reputed that an angel

would come periodically and stir up the waters. Whoever got into the water first after it was stirred, would be healed. (The author of this narrative does not support the superstition, and in fact, the most reliable manuscripts do not even record it). *(See footnote.) It was no doubt a natural, mineral hot spring (not uncommon in that region). Scientific knowledge being limited in those days, the characteristics of a natural mineral hot spring could easily have been identified as miraculous. There would have been certain distinct benefits naturally derived from dipping into the water. Many ailments are greatly relieved by such hot springs.

But why did Jesus come here? Surely He did not participate in the superstition. As there was a Courtier in Cana; and a Samaritan at the well of Jacob; and a Pharisee in the night; so there was a disillusioned cripple at the "Pool of Mercy." The people of God were pressed from every side. As far as their earthly pilgrimage was concerned, they were under the heel of Rome; but in the spiritual realm where solace should have come, they had only the choice between the unbearable yoke of the pharisaical law and the heartbreaking disillusionment of empty superstitions.

Now comes Jesus to the invalid of Bethesda. A new challenge confronts Him. Repeatedly Jesus has conquered the battlements of the human mind—tradition, prejudice, ignorance, unbelief, sin. Here at the "House of Mercy" He encounters a man in a merciless predicament. The only hope that this wretched man has clung to has, for thirty-eight years, been tantalizingly just out of reach. He is like the starving

captive chained to the wall just out of touch with the sumptuous banquet on the table before him. But he has nowhere else to go. His will, having been crushed by the grinding disappointment, Jesus asks if he has enough left to want to be healed. The bitterness spills out, but Jesus hardly lets it subside before He has given the command of deliverance. "**Arise, take up your pallet, and walk. And immediately the man was whole, and he took up his pallet and walked.**" As in the matter of faith, the issue of the will was raised, not as a condition of healing, but to point out the man's total inadequacy. The will to "take up the bed and walk" came after the healing. Had he been able to muster up his own will, he would not have needed Jesus.

Once again the Holy Spirit penetrated the thick walls of human inadequacy and brought about deliverance, not on the basis of any participation of human effort, but strictly by the power of God. In most cases the afflicted one had sought out Jesus. In this case Jesus sought out the needy one. It was an episode to give courage to the neediest and weakest of all human flesh. The Holy Spirit in pursuit of a soul is a formidable force. To be sure, there are those who seem able to resist unto ultimate destruction, all the efforts of divine grace, but the sweeping invitation of Jesus is that the neediest and weakest in all the world may come and find help. "**Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls; for My yoke is gracious [shaped to fit] and My burden is light**" (Matthew 11:28-30).

* An explanation is in order regarding the original text of the Scripture. The King James translation, which is probably still the most widely used, includes a sentence which records this superstition about the angel stirring up the waters of the pool. The more reliable manuscripts do not have it. How do we know which is correct? Since the issue will come up again, and perhaps a number of times, it would be well to take a moment and explain it. The New Testament was written originally in the Greek language. This Greek text was handed down from

century to century by scholars, for the most part in monasteries throughout the world. The earliest of these manuscripts, which would have been closer to the original writing, were done in capital letters without any punctuation, or even spacing between the words, because of the limited writing materials. These were called uncials, because of the large letters. Later manuscripts were done in capital and lower case letters, and they are called minuscules because of the small letters. This difference would help to date the manuscripts. The earliest manuscripts would, of course, be regarded as the closest to the text. There are over four thousand manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts in museums in various locations around the world. The Greek text, from which translations are made, has been compiled by the comparison of as many of these manuscripts as possible. There are some variations between these manuscripts. These variations are recorded at the bottom of the page of a Greek testament, in what is known as a critical apparatus. The variations are the result of either an error by the copyist or an effort by the copyist (though misapplied) to clarify the text. Considering the number of manuscripts, these variations are remarkably few, and they do not affect significantly the central meaning of the passage. When such variations occur, it is the task of the translator to examine all of the evidence and determine what is the best text to use. There are various ways of doing this, but for the most part the decision is made on the basis of the age and reliability of the manuscripts and the requirements of the context. When the King James translation was made (1611 A.D.) the basic text which was used at that time was called the Textus Receptus. Since that time there has been much more manuscript evidence accumulated which gives us a better text. Still, over three centuries later, the variations are relatively few and the King James Version, or Authorized Version, as it is sometimes called, remains to this day a very reliable translation which can be readily recommended, if not preferred. Language has undergone many changes, however, and thus the need in the modern day for translations which help to clarify these language problems.

LESSON TWENTY-ONE

John 5:10-18

TRANSLATION

And it was the Sabbath on that day. The Jews were saying to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your pallet.” And he answered them, “He who made me whole, that One said to me, ‘Take up your pallet and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, take it up and walk?” And the one who had been healed did not know who it was; for Jesus had withdrawn, there being a crowd in the place. After these things Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold you have become whole; do not continue in sin any longer, lest a worse thing happen to you.” The man went away and said to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole. And for this reason the Jews were harassing Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. And He answered them, “My Father works until now, and I am working;” for this reason then the Jews were rather seeking to kill Him, because He had not only broken the Sabbath, but also had spoken of God as His own Father, making Himself equal to God.

COMMENTARY

At Bethesda—Merciful and Merciless Clash!

The tension had been steadily mounting between Jesus and the Pharisees. Occasionally there had been furious outbreaks, as in the clash with the temple merchants. These confrontations would come more frequently. Nothing seemed to stir up the conflict like a drop of mercy. The grace of God seemed to hit the parched and seared soul of the self-righteous Pharisee like water on a hot skillet.

God's Law had come with grace and mercy. In ages past, on Mount Sinai, as Moses presented to God the hewn stones on which He would inscribe His changeless will, God

responded with a great hymn of mercy. **“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin...”** (Exodus 34:5-7). Even in the age of law, prior to the coming of Jesus, mercy is a constantly recurring theme. In the Hebrew text (the language of the Old Testament), the word is *chesed*. It means

"mercy," in the sense of "kindness." It is the outward expression of the inward attitude of compassion. In the King James Version of the Bible, the word, *chesed*, is also translated by "pity," "loving kindness," "favor," and "goodness." The word, with these various translations, occurs over four hundred times in the Old Testament. The companion word to "mercy," is "grace." These two words occur often together. The Hebrew word is *chanan*, and refers more to the attitude of compassion or benevolence, than to the outward act of compassion. The word, with its derivatives, occurs over a hundred times in the Old Testament. It is the root of the name John, which is really Jochanan and means "Jehovah is gracious." It is a most significant name for the prophet who came to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. The word "grace," as it is used both in Old and New Testaments, really signifies "the free flow of divine benevolence or compassion." The common definition—"the unmerited favor of God" misses the true flavor of the word. To define it, thus, is like giving someone a gift and then making sure that they understand how little they really deserve it. It would be like giving a gift with one hand and taking it away with the other. It is understood, of course, that a gift is a gift, and is not based upon anything that the receiver has done to earn it. It is not in keeping with the spirit of giving, however, to emphasize that point; Jesus never made an issue of this with the people to whom He ministered. The Greek word, *dorean*, frequently used in referring to Jesus' ministry, emphasizes the free-flowing nature of His gifts. In all the miracles which Jesus performed we do not find any reference to the unworthiness of the recipient of His grace. The cripple at Bethesda was no exception.

The drop of mercy had brought about an immediate reaction that precipitated the

true nature of the Pharisees. As agents of Satan, they were specialists in the art of fraud. Professing to be shepherds of God, they had been duped by Satan into participating in his perfidious scheme to starve the people of God by feeding them weeds instead of wheat; chaff instead of grain. The Law was supposed to be **the bread of life**, nourishing the souls of men on the word of God. It was to make known the heart and ways of God, that man might come ultimately unto his own glorious fulfillment in the eternal purposes of God. In its original statement, the heart of the Law was the grace and mercy of God. The Pharisees, blind to the truth of God, and stripped of true righteousness, had clothed themselves in the filthy rags of self-righteousness and groped in error; blind leaders of the blind.

Touched by the true grace and mercy of God, the lame man cast aside thirty-eight years of weakness in a moment, and with it the empty rules of a religious system that had been powerless to help him. He shouldered his pallet prison and walked free. The warden of hell cannot let one prisoner escape. He dispatches his agents to intercept the escapee: "**By whose authority do you go free? Why, by the authority of the One who made me whole. I don't know who He is, but He did the job.**" Their system having failed the man for thirty-eight years, the Pharisees were speechless.

Meanwhile, Jesus was not through with the man. He sought him out in the temple. "**Behold you have become whole; do not continue in sin any longer lest a worse thing happen to you.**" On the surface these words seem, not only hard but, in fact, impossible. If the Law could not take away sin and the Lamb of God had not yet been offered, then how could this man

be expected to “**continue no longer in sin**”? Jesus now introduces him to the need of His Spirit. The physical healing is not enough. Shortly, Jesus will tell a large number of His disciples, “**The spirit is the life-giving element, the flesh does not profit anything. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life**” (John 6:63). Obviously, Jesus did not lay upon this man the burden of “sinless perfection.” Again, we must observe that had this been possible at this point, there would have been no need for Jesus to die. As with the matter of faith, and of the will, as well as the attitudes set forth in the “Sermon on the Mount,” a standard is being lifted up which will prove to fallen man that his condition is hopeless apart from divine help. But help is coming, and soon the Lamb of God will be slain; and the sin of the world, forever taken away. Meanwhile Jesus is urging the man to leave the course of sin (as the present tense in Greek suggests), and follow Him. The Greek word for sin here really means “missing the mark,” rather than committing offenses. It has to do with one’s general attitude toward God. He is not saying to the man, “You must quit your wrongdoing or you will be punished with a worse sickness.” Rather, He is saying to him, “You have been following a wrong course, away from God; now you must change your course and follow after righteousness. If you continue on the course you are going, you will be subject to the misfortunes of a world that is controlled by Satan.”

Certainly Jesus was not telling this man that he had been sick because he was a

sinner. There were millions of sinners in the world at that time that were not sick. Sometimes in the Bible, sickness did come as a judgment from God. It is not sound to say, however, that all sickness is a result of God’s punishment. Sometimes God’s people suffer for testing, as in the case of Job; or for the glory of God, as in the case of Lazarus; or to reveal the weakness of the flesh, and to keep one dependent upon the grace of God, as in the case of Paul. It is, of course, true that the disobedience of Adam and Eve at the fall of man was the basic reason for the presence of all evil in the world, including sickness. Satan, as ruler of this world, controls, to a certain extent, its evil forces. People who are not in the family of God are constantly vulnerable to these evils. Those who are in the family of God are often touched by adversity, but only as God allows it. Generally speaking, Satan’s efforts to get at God’s people are thwarted by God’s hand. Satan is never allowed to affect God’s people at his own whim. God does not let Satan go beyond the point of His own divine purpose.

When the Pharisees discovered that it was Jesus who had wrought this miracle, they intensified their harassing of Him. So blinded were they by their jealousy, that they would let their entire nation be destroyed rather than admit that their religious system was not working. Thousands of Jews did see the light, and follow Jesus; but the majority, misguided by blind agents of Satan, would soon participate in the crucifixion of Jesus, and plunge their nation into oblivion.

LESSON TWENTY - TWO

John 5:19-30

TRANSLATION

Jesus then was answering and saying to them, I tell you the absolute truth, the Son is not able to do anything from Himself, except what He sees the Father doing. For the things which that One is doing, these also the Son likewise is doing. For the Father is the friend of the Son and will show to Him all things which He Himself is doing, and He will show to Him greater works than these, in order that you may marvel. For even as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father does not judge anything, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all people may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. For he who is not honoring the Son, is not honoring the Father who sent Him. I tell you the absolute truth that he who hears My words and believes on the One who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but is translated out of death into life. I tell you the absolute truth that the hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they who hear shall live. For even as the Father has life in Himself so also He has given to the Son to have life in Himself; And He has given authority to Him to judge, because He is the Son of Man. So do not marvel at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice and those who have done good shall go out unto the resurrection of life, and those who have made a practice of evil unto the resurrection of judgment. I am not able to do anything from Myself; even as I hear I judge, and My judgment is right, because I seek not My will but the will of the One who has sent Me."

COMMENTARY

Jesus vs. the Pharisees—The Test for Truth

Patiently, Jesus explains to the Pharisees the deep implications of His relationship to the Father. He had to give them a chance to understand, of course, but in reality it was like "**casting pearls before swine.**" So steeped were the Pharisees in their willful

religious system, that they had not the will or the desire to follow Jesus.

By far the most difficult thing to understand about Jesus is His relationship to the Godhead. From all indications in the

Bible, He must be seen as fully God and fully man. These qualities of being are interchangeable—Jesus sometimes taking one role and then the other. Yet each role is taken completely honestly. When Jesus speaks as the Son, He is not masquerading or play-acting. When He takes the role of the Father, He is not presumptuously taking upon Himself powers or authority that He does not in reality possess. Further complicating the matter is the relationship of Christ and the Holy Spirit. These facets of the Godhead have a specific identity, or role, in the Godhead; and yet the unity of the Godhead must always be preserved. With all the multiple expressions of God, revealed to man from the very beginning, the Bible insists from Genesis to Revelation on the truth that God is One. It was expressd in the age-old dictum given to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4: ‘Shema’ Yisera’el Yehovah ’eloheynu Yehovah ‘echad—**Hear O’ Israel, the Lord our God is One.** From this truth neither the Jews nor the Christians have ever departed. This is why Jesus was such a great stumbling block to those Jews who were blinded to the prophetic statements that clearly identify Him as the coming Messiah—the Anointed One, the Son of God—the eternal God projecting Himself to earth as a human, coming in human form to reveal Himself to man. This is clearly set forth in Isaiah 9:6. The reason the Pharisees were confused was because they were ignorant of the Old Testament Scriptures. They were masters of their own sacred writings, but they were saturated rather with the traditions of men than the Word of God. It must be noted that there is today among the pastors and leaders of the church, a disturbing tendency in the same direction. Some Christian leaders of today are well schooled in the systematic theologies; and the Christian life manuals; and the methods of church promotion—the

traditions of the elders—to say nothing of modern psychology: but they are sadly lacking in the knowledge of the Word of God. If a man is going to lead the people of God, he must be saturated with the Word of God. I am absolutely convinced that much of the confusion and fragmentation in the church today is the result of a lack of knowledge of the Bible. There is a great deal of activity in terms of Bible study groups but these are often led by laymen, who are not specialists in the Word, and they turn out to be opinion sessions—blind leaders of the blind. Unfortunately, even many pastors are weak in the knowledge of the Word. If a man is going to be an authority on the Bible, he must master the original languages. Without this, he is more subject to deception. If the words of the Bible do not have precise enough meaning so as to present clearly what God is trying to say to us, then we are all lost. But if the words do have precise meaning, then there should be no confusion about the teaching of the Scripture. The fact of the matter is, however, that there is great confusion in the church today and we must look for the problem in man and not God. Certainly the Holy Spirit has not failed us. If there is a difference of opinion on the meaning of a text, it is not adequate to say that those who differ from us simply do not have the Holy Spirit. The accurate interpretation of the Bible must be a combination of adequate training in the Word and its original languages as well as the fullness of the Holy Spirit within. An adequate knowledge of the Bible requires more than technical training; it requires saturation with the Word and practical experience living in the truth of the Word. Not everyone can be so prepared. But there are those whom God has gifted and provided with adequate training. These should be looked to for guidance in the Word. Those who are gifted in other areas of the work,

should stay with those areas. I fear there is a spirit of independence in which everyone wants to be his own Bible interpreter. Let each one express the gifts as God has given them, and let the church be discerning in its use of the gifts. God will teach us the truth, if we will receive His teachers. The failure of the church to be discerning in this matter has brought us into much confusion.

The reason for the foregoing discussion is that we are facing a passage that has some very crucial issues in it regarding the truth about Jesus Christ. Jesus has shown the Pharisees their failure in understanding Him, which failure has come as a result of their ignorance of the Word. They had relied upon the traditions of the elders. The church today is in danger of going down the same road. In the midst of the existing confusion, it is vitally important that God raise up men who are saturated with His Word and filled with His Spirit to help lead the church through the labyrinth of conflicting ideas regarding what the Bible teaches. And if a man is called to teach, let him be certain that he has adequate training, as well as the fullness of the Spirit, lest he mislead the people of God. James gives a very stern warning: **“Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing**

that we shall receive the greater judgment” (James 3:1).

We must give some further clarification in the above matter. We must distinguish between those who have the responsibility and the authority as teachers, to interpret the Word and establish basic doctrines of the church, and those who are merely communicating these established truths. The latter may be merely declaring the Gospel, which is, of course, quite in order. Even one who assumes this position must be very careful what they teach, because without the proper equipment it is very difficult to distinguish between truth and error in the midst of the large amount of material that is given today in the name of teaching. Furthermore, the above remarks were not intended to indicate in any way that one must have a knowledge of the original languages to read the Bible. There is much in the Bible that can be understood as it is given in the translation. What we have been referring to, have been those critical points of doctrine over which the church has come into great division. These are days when we need very strong teaching within the church to prevent us from losing the truth altogether.

John 5:19-30 (continued)

Jesus and His Relationship to the Father

But now, Jesus is presenting to the Jews some extremely crucial teaching about Himself. We must examine His words very carefully, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us what it is that He is saying. This matter of the relationship between Jesus and the Godhead has brought much confusion and division into the church. If we listen carefully in the Spirit, we will understand what He is saying.

“I tell you the absolute truth”—a phrase usually translated either “verily, verily” or “truly, truly”—is a Hebrew expression. It is used to emphasize the undebatable certainty of what is being said. **“The Son is not able to do anything from Himself”—**that is, He cannot act independently of the Godhead. The Godhead (that is, the sum total of all that God is), is in essence a spirit being. Jesus, on earth, has a human form which allows Him to be an extension of the Godhead in His relationship to the people of earth. He is, so to speak, the arms and hands of God. The body which Jesus took was subject to all the limitations of human flesh, but the Spirit of God within that body was able to function quite beyond human possibilities. The term, **Son**, refers to the position, or office, which Jesus assumed on the earth. As far as power is concerned, the body of Jesus was limited, but the Spirit within Him was not. As far as authority is concerned, the person of Jesus, including all of His natural attributes, was again, subject

to the Spirit of God which dwelt within Him.

“Except what He sees the Father doing”—a harmony of action, in which the Son is carrying out the authority of the Father. The term, **Father**, is only relevant in terms of the relationship of the Godhead to the world of created things. The implications of fatherhood can only be expressed through Christ, who is the projected Spirit of the Godhead, and Jesus, His human form. The idea of fatherhood carries with it two concepts—origin and authority. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ or God, was the same Spirit who **moved upon the face of the deep**, in Genesis 1. Thus, the Holy Spirit within Jesus expressed Himself as the Father of creation, incarnated (made flesh) in a human form. **“For the things which that One is doing, these things also the Son is doing likewise.”** It was not that Jesus was merely imitating something that He observed from another Being, it was rather that the Holy Spirit—or the Spirit of God within Jesus—was expressing the will of the Godhead and that will was being carried out on the earth through the instrumentality of Jesus. The Spirit of God within Jesus was, of course, the Father, to whom He referred: **“For the Father loves the Son and is showing to Him all the things which He Himself is doing.”** The word for love is in this case, *phile*, and not *agape*. At the human level, the word *phile*, refers to the affection of family or close

personal friends, rather than the love of caring and concern for everyone, as God commands in the word *agape*. (See the discussion of love in the commentary on John 3:16). At the divine level, *phile* implies the close personal relationship between father and son. Through the Son, the will and deeds of the Godhead are made known to man upon the earth in order that God may be glorified. Jesus carries out the will of the Father in life-giving miracles on the earth and acts for Him in judging the issues of mankind. He becomes then the visible expression of God giving to man the opportunity of either honoring or dishonoring the Father.

In view of the truths laid down in the preceding paragraph, we may now readily understand the statements of Christ in the rest of the chapter. As the visible expression of God, Jesus Christ, in whom dwelled all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form (Col. 2:9), became the touchstone of truth and error. Those who hear Him, and believe on God who sent Him, have eternal life, and even as they believe, are translated out of death into life. Such life can only be received through the Son, through whom God chose to communicate His life to the world.

Jesus Christ alone has God's authority to be both the giver of life and the judge of those who should receive it. This judgment will reach even to the tombs, where the dead, who did not have the opportunity of knowing Christ, will be judged in terms of the attitudes of their heart. Those who, within the limits of their human condition, have functioned in a context of good will, will be granted resurrection of life; but those who were careless in the course of their lives, will be brought to judgment. (In Romans 2, Paul develops this theme, indicating that the Jews will be judged according to the Law of Moses, and those who are not under the Law will be judged in terms of their own conscience). **"And My judgment is right, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the One who sent Me."** In the affairs of mankind on the earth, Jesus Christ is the only truly just judge, because He does not judge as a man, in the strength of His human nature; but He judges as the One who expresses the will of the Spirit of God within Him. In that troublesome matter of what will happen to the so-called "heathen," it is well to remember the words of Genesis 18:25, **"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"**

LESSON TWENTY - FOUR

John 5:31-47

TRANSLATION

If I give testimony concerning Myself, My testimony is not true. There is another who testifies concerning Me, and I know that the testimony which he testifies concerning Me is true. You sent to John and he gave testimony with respect to the truth. I do not receive the testimony from a man, but I am saying these things in order that you may be saved. That one was the burning and shining light, and you had the will to rejoice for a time in his light. And I have the greater testimony than John; for the deeds which the Father has given Me to complete, the very deeds which I am doing, testify concerning Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father who sent Me, that One has testified concerning Me. You have neither heard Him at any time nor beheld His external appearance, and His word you do not have abiding in you, because He whom that One has sent, this one you have not believed. You have searched the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life in them, and those are the ones who testify concerning Me; and you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from man, but I have come to know you that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in the name of My father and you do not receive Me; if another one comes in his own name, that one you will receive. How are you able to believe, when you receive the glory from another, and do not seek the glory which is from the only God? Do not think that I would accuse you before the Father; Moses, in whom you have placed your hope, is the one who accuses you. For if you had been in the practice of believing Moses, you would be believing Me; for that one wrote concerning Me. But if you do not believe the writings of that one, how would you believe My words?

COMMENTARY

Jesus vs. the Pharisees—The Folly of their Faithlessness

Jesus continues His confrontation with the Pharisees. As relentlessly they pursue Him, so He relentlessly faces them with the truth. What is it that is really keeping them from faith in Him? Jesus knows well these

crafty old Pharisees. From time to time ancient records are referred to that give a different slant to these religious leaders. There are efforts at times to show that these men were honestly concerned about

Jesus as an imposter who was drawing the people of God into error. But anyone who is thoroughly acquainted with Jesus and His words, knows that Jesus never saw them in this light. If such documents are indeed authentic, it is obvious that they were efforts on the part of the Pharisees to whitewash the whole episode.

In this particular confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus goes right to the heart of their unbelief—they are willfully and stubbornly refusing to accept the evidence. They have not opened their hearts to the witness of the Holy Spirit. The authenticity of Jesus can never be established by human means. But these men are supposed to be the leaders of God's people. It should be expected of them that they would be able to discern the truth. Prophets of old had been the channel of communication between God and His people. Again and again, in the Old Testament we find the men of God in touch with the Holy Spirit. The Pharisee of Jesus' day was not in the same league at all. For the most part the lot of them were pious frauds—agents of Satan—substituting the venom of asps for the milk of the Word. In the eyes of Jesus, their temples were tombs and their priestly robes, filthy rags.

Jesus confronts their unbelief. He goes immediately to the heart of the problem. To all of their cynical questioning, He has one answer. Their blind eyes and stony hearts are closed to the witness of the Spirit concerning Him. There is no way that the human heart can see Jesus as the Son of God, sent into the world to be its Savior, without the activity of the Holy Spirit.

In terms of His human nature on the earth, Jesus cannot testify concerning Himself. Apart from the Spirit of God, His testimony would only have human dimension. It would not have had the penetrating power

to give it credibility. The truth concerning Jesus had to come from God, through His Holy Spirit; from the deeds and miracles which Jesus did on the earth; and from the Scriptures which had been given by God through Moses and the prophets.

All of these elements, which would form the foundation of their faith, had been rejected by the Pharisees. The witness of God concerning His Son, had fallen upon deaf ears; the miracles which Jesus did went unperceived by sightless eyes; the treasured Torah of Moses had fallen on hardened hearts like seed upon the beaten path. Rejecting these instruments of faith, the Pharisees were left without hope.

The Pharisees in their unbelief, hid behind a religious facade. As we have seen, their real reason for failing to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God had nothing to do with honest questioning. It had to do with the will. Jesus said, "**If any man will to do My will, he shall know the teaching whether it be of God or I speak from Myself [as a man]**" (John 7:17). The Bible makes it very clear that faith is a gift of the Spirit. "**By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast**" (Ephesians 2:8). To the Greeks, the very symbol of worldly wisdom, Paul said, "**The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him and he is not able to know them for they are spiritually discerned**" (II Corinthians 2:14). It is not possible for the human mind to find its way to the Infinite, Absolute, Creator of the Universe. If there is to be faith, God Himself must reach out through His Holy Spirit to draw the heart to Himself. But to whom does He reach out? He reaches out to all who, seeing their own spiritual poverty, turn toward Him. But

does that not itself take faith? Certainly, it does indeed take faith, but God knows the heart, and supplies the faith that will enable the heart to give expression to its need. The big problem, of course, is that people do not want to give up their independence. It is not that they cannot find faith, but rather, not wanting God involved in their lives, they have not looked for it, or they have looked for it in such a way as to make it quite likely that they will not find it.

There are many in the world today in the same position as the Pharisees. How do we as God's agents cope with them? Remember, it is our task to declare the

Word of God in the Spirit. We do not have to prove; we do not have to persuade; we do not have to pressure. Only the Holy Spirit can do these things. Our task is to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to lead us to the ones to whom He wants us to minister. If we go in the flesh we will surely fail. Sometimes Christians feel that in order to give a witness for Christ, they must be theologians and philosophers and scientists and psychologists all rolled into one and topped off by the skill of the promoter. Our task is to sow the seed of the Word, and give the witness of what Christ means to us in our own lives. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to draw the heart to Christ.

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

John 6:1-15

TRANSLATION

After these things Jesus went away across the Sea of Galilee of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following Him, because they were seeing the miracles which He was doing upon the infirm. And Jesus went away unto the mountain, and was sitting there with His disciples. And the Passover was near, the Feast of the Jews. When Jesus had lifted up His eyes and beheld that there was a large multitude coming unto Him, He said to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But He was saying this testing him; for He Himself knew what He was about to do. Philip answered Him; "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, in order that each one may take a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to Him, "There is a little lad here who has five barley loaves and two little fish; but what are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people recline." And there was much grass in the place. The men reclined then, in number about five thousand. Then Jesus took the bread and when He had given thanks, He distributed it to those who were reclining, and likewise also of the little fish as much as they wanted. And when they were satisfied, He said to His disciples, "Gather together the leftover fragments, lest any perish." And they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over from those who had eaten. The people then knowing the miracle which He had done, were saying, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world." Jesus then, knowing they were about to come to seize Him that they might make Him king, departed again unto the mountain Himself alone.

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Miracle of the Loaves

By this time, a considerable crowd was following Jesus because they were fascinated by the miracles He was doing. Jesus was not flattered. He had no illusions about this fickle crowd. Later on, when they wanted to seize Him and make Him king,

He exposed their phoniness by telling them that the only reason they wanted Him for a king was so that he could fill their bellies with food from heaven.

Nevertheless, His compassionate heart would not allow Him to ignore the people. With the tragic news of the death of John the Baptist, He had sought a moment of quiet with His disciples on the hills of Galilee. As usual, the crowd was insensitive to His personal needs, and they sought Him out. Jesus saw the long procession making its way up the hillside, and His great heart was filled with compassion for them. Only the power of the Holy Spirit within can give one the kind of compelling love that reaches out to the needy, unchecked by human weariness or pain.

A Man of the Spirit, Jesus was nevertheless, not "spiritualistic." That is, He was not so obsessed with matters of the Spirit, that He was indifferent or insensitive to the things of this earth. He was not an "ascetic" (one who seeks spiritual growth by the denial of natural desires). It had been a long trek around the shores of Galilee and He knew instinctively that the people would be famished and fainting. This is a beautiful touch in the understanding of the nature of Jesus. It is so easy to think of Him as a religious leader, so devoted to His work that He would be indifferent to, if not actually contemptuous of, the earthly needs and desires. It is most important to realize that Jesus taught that true spiritual growth emerges as a result of interaction with the routines of daily living rather than in excursions to religious retreats, or withdrawing from society in "heavenly hideaways."

Contrary to some speculations, there has been no adequate evidence that Jesus was ever a member of such ascetic or monastic sects as the Essenes. As a matter of fact, He Himself draws a contrast between His approach and that of John the Baptist. While the people thought that John was

like a madman living in the wilderness, they accused Jesus of eating and drinking too much. Normalcy is a very important word, both in the describing of Jesus' life and in the following of His teachings. The great thrust of Jesus' message was that following the Law did not of itself bring about spiritual life, but rather the presence of the Holy Spirit within the heart. While Jesus never taught that the Law of God should be ignored, He did teach that the laws, or traditions, of the Pharisees, which had far exceeded the original law, would only lead to bondage. Thus it was, that when Jesus saw this large crowd coming to Him up the hillside, His thoughts were as much in terms of their physical needs, as the evangelistic opportunity their coming would afford. In fact, all that Jesus did in this particular episode was to feed them and let them go. But, what a feeding that was! It has served as a magnificent object lesson of the power of God to feed both body and soul unto this very day. How he accomplished this, is one of the great stories of all time.

When it became obvious that Jesus was planning to feed this multitude, the disciples were amazed. Their amazement turned into shock when He asked them for suggestions as to how they were going to do it: "If there were a market, we have no money. You couldn't even feed this crowd with 200 denarii (a denarius was about a day's wages for a farm worker)." Jesus was not disappointed in the answer. He had really not expected more. It was not that He needed their help, but rather that they needed to know their helplessness. Andrew's response, hardly more optimistic than Philip's, was what Jesus wanted to hear. "**What are these among so many?**" A man's ministry will hardly be worth anything at all until he has come to the place of total failure. A good parallel in the

Scripture is Paul's statement, "**Who is sufficient for these things?**" (II Corinthians 2:16). Paul had learned well the answer to this, which he gives in II Corinthians 3:5, "**Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to consider anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God . . .**" It would be a while, yet, before the disciples would fully understand the meaning of this.

Meanwhile the disciples had brought forward the little lad's meager lunch. Jesus was delighted: "It will be enough. Make the people recline." Without a moment's hesitancy, Jesus gave thanks for the provision and began to distribute it to the disciples and they in turn to the people. Here on the hillside, by the shores of Galilee, Jesus the Son of God gave bread to the world; and it was enough.

The bread, like the water, has a symbolic meaning. Later on, referring back to this incident, Jesus would say, "**I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believes on Me shall never thirst.**" (John 6:35). Jesus had been born at Bethlehem. The name means House of Bread. Whereas the water offered to the woman by the well was the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the bread is the symbol of life itself. When Jesus said, "**I am the Bread of Life,**" He was identifying Himself with the life-giving origin of the universe. John 1:1 says, "**The Word was God.**" In John 1:14, it says, "**The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.**" Thus Jesus, who was the Word made flesh, was also God. Thus Jesus rightfully claims to be the source of life. In John 14:6, He says, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**" Jesus was not just the giver of life, He was life itself. All life began with a living organism. It is absurd to think that a mineral element can

suddenly transform itself into a living element. The seed of life which was in the womb of Mary and brought forth a son, was the seed of life which was the beginning of the universe.

And when they were filled....Jesus' ministry to the physical needs of these people was completely satisfying. As we have said before, a miracle is a sign. It is intended to teach something or to demonstrate something. But we must be careful to apply the miracle, or sign, as Jesus intended to apply it and not as we would like to apply it. This miracle was not intended to demonstrate that no Christian in the world would ever go physically hungry. Jesus Himself was physically hungry during His forty days of testing in the wilderness. The Apostle Paul suffered much personal privation. In II Corinthians 11, as he is recounting his sacrifices in the cause of Christ, he says, "**. . . in weariness and in painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness**" (v. 27). It would be wrong, then, to assume that anyone who is a Christian, should have their problems so continually solved, that they would never be in want. This would be true in matters of health, material circumstances, social problems and any other human physical adversity. God did not come into this world to make everyone contented; He came into the world to deliver us from spiritual death; thus, the teaching of this particular miracle. Jesus is the Bread of Life; He restores our spirits; when we take His Spirit into our spirit, we are filled with Him and satisfied. "Blessed are they who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness because they shall be satisfied."

"Gather together the leftover fragments...and they filled twelve baskets..."; one basket for each disciple.

What the disciples had received from Jesus, they had given to the people. And when the people were filled, there was yet more to give. When the servants of God find their

source of supply in Jesus Christ, they will never run out of something to give to His people.

LESSON TWENTY-SIX

John 6:16-35

TRANSLATION

And when it became late His disciples went down to the sea and, having embarked on a boat they began to cross the sea unto Capernaum. And it had already become dark; and Jesus had not yet come to them; moreover there arose great driving wind. And when they had rode about twenty five or thirty stadia (approximately three miles), they were beholding Jesus walking on the sea and coming near to the boat, and they were afraid. And He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” They were willing then to receive Him into the boat; and immediately the boat came to the land unto which they were going.

On the next day, the crowd which had stood on the other side of the sea, saw that there was not any other boat there except the one; and that Jesus had not gone together with His disciples in the boat, but His disciples only went away. Another boat came out of Tiberias near the place where they had eaten bread after the Lord had given thanks. When therefore the crowd saw that Jesus was not there nor His disciples, they themselves embarked on the boat and came unto Capernaum to seek Jesus. And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them and said, I tell you the absolute truth, you seek Me not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food that remains unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you; for God the Father has set His seal upon this One.” They said then to Him, “What do we do that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe on the One whom that One sent.” They said to Him, “What sign do You do, that we may see and believe You? What work do you do? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and even as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” Jesus then said to them, “I tell you the absolute truth, Moses did not give you that bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven; for the Bread of God is He who descended out of heaven and gave life to the world.” They said then to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believes on Me shall never thirst.”

COMMENTARY

After the Miracle of the Loaves—Jesus Walks on the Sea

It would seem that the power of Jesus to feed five thousand people from two sardines and five barley loaves, would have convinced even the most skeptical that His followers would be completely secure in His care. Anyone who had participated in that event would certainly have felt that it was an unforgettable experience. It took the disciples approximately five hours to forget. During the crossing, darkness had descended upon them, and a strong driving wind, had sprung up on the sea. According to the account of this episode given by Matthew, both craft and oarsmen were "tormented" by the waves. They fought the sea into the night, and finally at the fourth watch (just before the dawn), Jesus came to them, walking upon the sea. The disciples were terrified. Jesus had to reassure them, "It is I; do not be afraid." The Spirit of God within Jesus penetrated the storm without and the terror within, and they received Him into the ship. Once more Jesus mastered the elements of nature and the ship came immediately to the opposite shore.

From this simple story we learn the following principles:

1. It is not the number nor the greatness of the miracles that produces faith, but the power of the Spirit.
2. Sometimes Jesus leaves us to struggle with our adversities for a considerable period of time before He comes to our deliverance.
3. His coming is based not upon our own efforts, or faith, but upon His timing.
4. He came to them in the midst of their fears.
5. It is the voice of His Spirit within us that brings peace, and not the solving of the problem.
6. The very elements that are our enemy become the footstool of Christ. He and not Satan has ultimate mastery of the forces of the universe.
7. When Jesus has finished with the purpose for which He has allowed our adversity, He brings deliverance speedily.

John 6:16-35 (continued)

After the Miracle of the Loaves—The People Who Ate Them

Their stomachs now full from the startling miracle of the loaves, the people were amazed at Jesus, and chased Him all over Galilee. Jesus was not impressed. He said to them, "**I tell you the absolute truth, you are seeking Me not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.**" As with the woman at the well, Jesus directed their attention to the Spirit. "**Do not work for the food which perishes, but the food that endures unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give you.**" The giving of this living water and living bread was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah 750 years before Christ. Listen to Him: "**Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? And labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness**" (Isaiah 55:1, 2).

The whole purpose of God for man on the earth has to do with the cultivation of the spirit. According to the Bible there is a difference between the soul and the spirit. In I Thessalonians 5:23, Paul says, "**And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may all of your parts, spirit, soul and body, be kept blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" (see, also, Hebrews 4:12.)

The spirit is the innermost essence of our being. It is where the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ, dwells in all who have accepted Him. It is that aspect of man where death occurred according to God's promise when man disobeyed Him in the Garden of Eden. The life of the spirit is only restored when Christ comes in. That is why salvation has to be more than belief in certain ideas; it must be the receiving of new life. The soul, on the other hand, is the center of the natural thought processes and emotions. In fact, the Greek word for soul is *psuche*. It is, of course, the basis for the word psychology. As the body is the vehicle through which the soul functions, so the soul is the vehicle through which the spirit functions. That is, the spirit is the directing force of the soul, or the thought processes. The spirit that is not occupied by Christ, is directed by Satan. "**In which then you walked, according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who now energizes the children of disobedience**" (Ephesians 2:2). The spirit, possessed by Christ, is the ongoing eternal essence of our being. The body, which is the earthly temple of our spirit, shall one day be replaced by a glorified body, which will be capable of handling the eternal necessities of our spirit. It is this spirit that Jesus called attention to when He told those who had partaken of the feast, that they should not be so concerned with the food that perishes but that which endures unto eternal life. The water of life which

Jesus offered to the woman at the well, symbolizes Christ as the giver of life; the bread now offered to the crowd, symbolized Christ as the One who nourishes life. The miracle of the loaves was the seal by which God demonstrated Jesus' authority to offer the living bread.

The crowd was skeptical of this free offer. Never in their years of experience with religion had they ever been offered anything free. It had always entailed numerous "works" or "deeds of righteousness." The Pharisees had always put a price tag on God's blessings. Jesus replied that there was only one deed—**to believe**. This was much too simple for the Jews, bowed by the weight of a myriad of laws. The multiplying of a few barley rolls

into a feast for thousands, not being an adequate proof, they sought another sign. They appealed to Moses and the manna in the wilderness for an example of a sign. Jesus said that it was not Moses who gave that bread but the Father, the same One who now sends Him in person to give life to the world.

Once again the words of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, penetrated the walls of blindness and ignorance; and the people, like the woman at the well, asked for the living bread. Jesus responded that if they wanted this bread, they must take Him into their spirits. **"I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believes on Me shall never thirst."**

LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT

John 6:36-51

TRANSLATION

But I said to you, that you have beheld Me and you do not believe. Everyone whom My Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and He who comes to Me I will in no way cast out, because I have descended from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of the One who sent Me; that everything which He has given to Me shall not be lost from Him, but I will raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes on Him will have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. The Jews then were murmuring concerning Him because He said, "I am the bread who descended out of heaven." And they were saying, "This is Jesus, the Son of Joseph, is it not, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have descended out of heaven?'" Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not murmur with one another. No one is able to come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God;' everyone who has heard from the Father and has learned, comes to Me. It is not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from the Father, this One has beheld the Father. I tell you the absolute truth, he who believes has eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and died. This One is the bread who descends out of heaven, that one may eat of Him and not die. I am the Bread of Life who has descended out of heaven; if anyone eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give him is My flesh for the life of the world."

COMMENTARY

The Personal Confrontation with The Bread of Life

To the Jews, a man who talked about being a loaf of bread was hard enough to accept. But, when that man who had been born right in their own village talked about coming out of heaven, it was, in their minds, incredible. If these Jews were ever to accept Jesus as the Son of God it would require a greater miracle than that which

produced the feast that they had all partaken of on the hills of Galilee. (Note: it is a most unfortunate thing that in the church today people will get quite excited about a physical healing, but pass off a spiritual healing as rather common.) The miracle of belief is the greatest miracle of all.

The lengthy discussion which Jesus had with the Jews following the miracle of the loaves, gave evidence enough that no miracle, however great, was adequate to bring about belief in Jesus as the Son of God. While the skeptics were pondering the startling words of Jesus, He told them, in effect, not to bother reasoning the matter out in their minds, because no one could accept Him unless the Father, Himself, would draw them. That is, the Spirit of God would have to open their spiritual eyes or they could not see Him. The Jews as a nation, had been spiritually blind to the things of God for centuries. The prophets had warned them that if they continued in their ways of idolatry and rebellion, this would happen to them. They did persist in their carelessness and lost the insight into the things of God, which had been their unique privilege as the agents whom God had appointed to make Him known to the world. The price for this privilege, however, was simplicity and submission. While nations around them pursue worldly glory, they must remain free from worldly ambitions, so that they could devote themselves to the service of God. That the Jewish people had a unique place in the world is clear from God's word to them given by Moses at the time that they were about to receive the Law from Mount Sinai. **"Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."** (Exodus 19:5, 6). This position of special privilege with God had been forfeited by the Jews by their desire to be like other nations and to achieve an earthly glory. The warnings which God had communicated to them through numerous prophets, went unheeded, and this special

place with God was indeed lost. However, all of the prophets spoke of future deliverance by a coming Messiah. Ultimately their hearts would be turned again unto God, and their place with Him restored through this Messiah. The promised Messiah now stood before them, but their spiritual blindness prevented their seeing Him as such. In the past, all of God's dealings with Israel were on a national level. That is, all of the offerings, ceremonies and blessings of God excluded no one who was, in fact, a natural member of the family of Israel. But now, as we saw in the third chapter of John, in the discussion about Nicodemus, identity with the family of God would be on an individual basis. Only those, whose eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit, would be able to see Jesus as the Son of God and to accept Him as Savior.

Jesus' discussion with the Jews, after the miracle of the loaves, was in essence much the same as His discussion with Nicodemus, only in different terms. He had told Nicodemus that no one could see the kingdom of God unless he were born again of the spirit. Here, He tells the Jews, "**No one is able to come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw him.**" In Hebrews 12:9, God referred to the Father of spirits. As such, He is, of course, the originator of life in the spirit. The bringing of divine life to the human spirit is that which Jesus referred to in His discussion with Nicodemus, as "**being born of the spirit.**" But, if no one can believe in Christ apart from the action of the Holy spirit, then how can God make man responsible for his own salvation? According to the Scripture there is enough of the grace of God in the world that anyone who wants the truth may have it. John 1 tells us that Jesus was the true light who Lights every man, while coming into the world. Titus

2:11 says, “**The grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men.**” Again, in II Peter 3:9, “**God is not tardy concerning the promise, as some reckon tardiness, but is longsuffering unto us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance.**” These words are in accordance with Jesus’ own words in Matthew 11:28, “**Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**” and with the words now spoken to the Jews in the sixth chapter of John, “**He who comes to Me, I will in no way cast out.**” The key seems to be in the will to come. Nicodemus came, and in his coming was touched by the Spirit and made to see. And before Nicodemus, the disciples had come. The woman at the well came and her fellow Samaritans. All who came truly seeking went away truly seeing.

And now, Jesus’ fellow countrymen stand before Him. Many of them are from His same village. Do they have the will to believe? It is they who are on trial, and not Jesus. In response to their skeptical murmurings, Jesus quotes from the prophets of the Old Testament which they supposedly have accepted (Isaiah 54:13). They are without excuse. If they will but listen, the Spirit will draw them. It is theirs to hear; it is God’s to respond. It is theirs to come; it is God’s to raise them up at the last day, deliver them from this world, and give them eternal life. In effect, Jesus was saying to them, “You were willing to partake of the material bread which I offered you, which had been produced through a miracle of God; and now you must let the same God who provided the material bread, open your eyes and give you the Bread of Life.”

The same words which Jesus spoke to the Jews on the occasion of the miracle of the loaves, were repeated in essence, though in different terms, to all the world at the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Here the Apostle Peter is addressing the great crowd that had assembled in Jerusalem on the occasion of the feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had come, according to the promise of Jesus, amidst manifestations of great power. Peter is explaining these manifestations to the crowd. He identifies this marvelous spectacle as the fulfillment of a prophecy by Joel: “**And it shall be in the last days, said God, I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.**” And at the end of the prophecy, “**And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved**” (Acts 2:17, 21). We are therefore justified in extending the promise and invitation of Jesus to everyone in the world today. As it was with the Jews of old, so it is with those who confront Jesus today. There is no possibility of the human mind being able to reason out the implications of the Son of God who came into the world. The Spirit of God must give spiritual eyes to earthly blindness. It is not a leap in the dark by the human mind; it is rather the energizing power of the Holy Spirit bridging the gap between human thought and the unfathomable mysteries of the Author of the Universe. It is not the capacity to believe, but the *will* to believe. **The key is in the coming.** It is the sincere search that brings the response from God. The invitation of Jesus still stands today: “**I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger at all and he who believes on Me shall not ever thirst. And he who comes to Me, I will not in any way cast out.**”

LESSON TWENTY-NINE

John 6:52-71

TRANSLATION

The Jews then were disputing with one another saying, “How is this One able to give us His flesh to eat?” Jesus then said to them, “If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourself. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. Even as the living Father sent Me and I live on account of the Father, so also he who eats Me shall live on account of Me. This One is the bread who has descended out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this food shall live forever.” These things He said in the synagogue while teaching in Capernaum. Many of His disciples then having heard, said, “This word is hard; who is able to hear it?” And Jesus knowing in Himself that His disciples were murmuring concerning this, said to them, “Does this offend you? If then you behold the Son of Man ascending where He was formerly, [what then]? The Spirit is that which gives life; the flesh does not profit anything the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life, but there are certain ones of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that were not believers and who it was who would betray Him. And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you that no one is able to come to Me except it be given to him from the Father.”

Out of this [discussion] many of His disciples went back and were no longer walking with Him. Jesus then said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and come to know that you are the holy One of God.” Jesus answered them, “Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” For He was speaking with reference to Judas, Simon Iscariot; for this one, one of the twelve, was about to betray Him.

COMMENTARY

Further Discussion on the “Bread of Life”

Without apology, Jesus continues to press the point that those who want His life in them must “eat His flesh and drink His blood.” To any natural mind, this would not only be offensive, it would also be an utter absurdity. It was especially offensive to the Jews, whose laws forbade them from drinking the blood even of animals, to say nothing of the blood of humans. Jesus never backed down on the point, even as He watched the growing stream of dissenters withdrawing from Him because His words were too hard for them to handle. Nor does Jesus bother to explain it to the satisfaction of anyone, except those who, touched by the Spirit of God, would catch that subtle message which was for their ears, and theirs alone.

It was a frequent thing with Jesus to present the truth in such a way that only those could understand it who were touched by the Spirit of God. He never tried to make the Word of God reasonable to the natural mind. The natural mind, affected by the Fall, does not have the capacity to reason without the influence of the distortions of an imperfect instrument. The natural mind can only function in terms of the interpretation of data that has been accumulated through knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, the instrument which accumulates the data affects the data that it accumulates. All human thought processes, attitudes, emotions, motivations, etc., are subject to distortions of imperfect records. The filing system of the brain is filled with misinformation, gaps in knowledge, prejudices, misinterpretations, etc. How can it ever come to absolute truth? For Jesus to have placed at the mercy of the human mind, the precious treasures of divine truth would have been, as He Himself said, **“casting pearls before swine.”** The good analogy of this is the

experience of trying to share with a friend, or acquaintance, some special thoughts that we have had, or perhaps a poem we have written, only to find to our dismay, that that which seems most precious to ourselves had no meaning to the person that we are sharing it with and we receive from them only polite response or perhaps ridicule. So Jesus did not want to take the precious treasures of divine truth and drag them in the dust before unhearing ears and unseeing eyes. He speaks of this in His explanation of the use of parables: **“And His disciples came to Him and said, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ And He answered them and said, ‘Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to those it is not given. For he who has, to him it shall be given and given abundantly; but to him who does not have, even what he has shall be snatched away from him. For this reason I am speaking to them in parables; that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not hear neither understand.”** (Matthew 13:10-13). He was addressing these words to Jews who had hardened their hearts against Him. He goes on to say to His own disciples, **“Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. Truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men earnestly desired to see the things which you see and did not see them, and to hear the things that you hear and did not hear them”** (13:16, 17). On another occasion, when His disciples had returned from a mission and were rejoicing over their new discovery of the power of God, the record says, **“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, ‘I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and**

prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Luke 10:21 AV).

So now we come back to Jesus’ statement, “**He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him.**” Many of the Jews took the statement literally, were offended and turned away from Jesus. It is interesting to note that while the simple woman of Samaria could readily receive the symbolism of the water of life, these Jews could not grasp the symbolism of the bread of life. Patiently, Jesus tried to explain to them that the manna which God offered to them in the wilderness, was a material substance and could not produce eternal life; whereas, He was the spiritual manna, the Bread of Life, which would produce eternal life in all who partook of it. When they could not grasp this, He said to them, in effect, “If you cannot understand this simple symbolism of spiritual truth, how in the world can you understand the resurrection?” He tried again, “**The spirit is that which gives life; the flesh does not profit anything; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.**” Surely they can understand that He is not talking to them about material substance but about spiritual life. It is too much for them. Silently they turn away to resume their place of bondage in the more familiar house of pharisaical law.

Assuming the spiritual symbolism here, what does it really mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ? Since Jesus has Himself ruled out the flesh as having meaning or value in the matter, we must then look to the spirit as the means of

appropriating this truth. The human spirit must possess the very life of Jesus within itself. The flesh and blood of Jesus were an obvious reference to the sacrifice which He would make. At the Last Supper, where Jesus shared His deepest moments with the disciples before His death, they were asked to receive the elements as symbolic of His body broken for them and His blood shed for them. At this point in time, the disciples could not possibly have been aware of that kind of symbolism. It would be some time before they would come to that hour. But, as in the case of many other things which Jesus had said to them, these were words whose meaning would have to wait for fulfillment and for understanding at a later time. The response of the disciples to Jesus did not indicate that they really understood the matter well enough to have stayed with Him for that reason. Their reason for staying was not that they understood everything, but rather, believing Him to be the Son of God, they had nowhere else to go. When one is submissive only with the things that he agrees on, he is not really submissive at all. True submission requires holding steady even when one does not understand or agree with the directives. In reality, only the Holy Spirit could have given the disciples the capacity to accept Jesus at this time, and only the Holy Spirit could hold them steadfast.

The reaction of the Jews to Jesus’ teaching on the subject of the eating of His flesh and blood, confirmed beyond doubt the statement which He had made earlier, “**No one is able to come to Me except it be given to him from the Father.**”

LESSON THIRTY

John 7:1-13

TRANSLATION

And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee; for He determined not to walk in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. And the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles was near. His brothers then said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, in order that Your disciples may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret and seeks himself to be a public figure. If You do these things make Yourself known to the world.” For His brothers were not even believing on Him. Jesus then said to them, “My time is not yet at hand, but your time is always ready. The world is not able to hate you, but it hates Me, because I am bearing witness concerning it that its works are evil. You go up unto the feast; I am not going up unto this feast [now], because My time has not yet been fulfilled.” And when He had said these things, He Himself remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up unto the feast, then He Himself also went up, not openly, but in secret. The Jews then were seeking Him at the feast and they were saying, “Where is that One?” And there was a great murmuring concerning Him among the crowd. Some, on the one hand, were saying, “He is good”; and others were saying, “No, but He is deceiving the people.” No one indeed was speaking boldly concerning Him on account of the fear of the Jews.

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Jewish Festivals

The time had come for the Feast of Tabernacles—the grandest of all the Jewish festivals. It had begun simply enough in a command to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 23), but over the centuries had evolved into a glorious spectacle which clothed the “holy city” in brilliant array. The festival occurred in autumn (Tisri, seventh month in the Jewish calendar) and was the most widely attended of all. From foreign regions near and far came Jews and proselytes to

identify themselves yet once more with the God of Israel. As in so many other facets of the Jewish religion, this festival, too, had lost its vital reality and succumbed to the empty rituals of Pharisaism. But even so, the simplicities and realities of the worship of the God of Israel were like a flash of light in the midst of the darkness and corruption of the pagan idolatries that surrounded the people of God. In marked contrast to the revelries and debaucheries of the pagan

festivals, the Jewish feasts were conducted in a mood of joyful simplicity. There were three main festivals, or feasts, and several minor ones. The Hebrew word used for the major feasts was *chlag*. This word carries with it both the idea of "pilgrimage" as well as "sacred dance." In the midst of these festivals, which usually lasted a week each, there were days of "holy convocation," which were days of worship much like Sabbath days, and served to keep the focus of the festival on its ultimate meaning. The joyful expressions of these occasions were adequate to express the heart of the worshiper of God, but in no way resembled the wild and lustful revelries of the pagan cults. While these Jewish festivals remained relatively pure throughout their history, the Jewish people themselves, alas, did not remain free from the influence of their Gentile neighbors; whom they were supposed to have driven out of the land, but did not. Many of the Jews fell prey to the fertility cults of Caanan, such as the worship of Baal and Astarte. For this indulgence they would suffer 70 years in captivity in Babylon.

The feasts, then, had remained as lighthouses in the dark land; a refuge for the faithful remnant who yet clung to the God of their fathers. The symbolism of the feasts remained unclouded throughout the centuries of uncertainty that marked the history of the Jews. To this very day, the feasts in the Orthodox Jewish home remain as a constant witness to the truth of God about the Messiah, if only their blinded eyes could see it.

The three major festivals, as outlined in Exodus 23 and Leviticus 23, were: (1) The Passover (with the Feast of Unleavened Bread); (2) Pentecost (or Weeks, Wheat harvest or Firstfruits); (3) The Feast of Tabernacles or of Ingathering. These feasts

were anchor points in the Jewish year. They kept God's people always mindful of their roots in Jehovah. Every male Israelite was commanded to appear before God on these festivals. Each festival had a threefold symbolism. These symbols had to do with the harvest, the history and the heavenly kingdom which God had promised. As for the harvests, the Passover had to do with barley harvest; Pentecost with wheat harvest; and Tabernacles with the ingathering of corn, wine, and oil. In terms of the historical symbolism, Passover had to do with the slaying the firstborn in Egypt just prior to the deliverance of Israel; Pentecost marked the giving of the Law on Sinai; and the Feast of Tabernacles reminded Israel of the wilderness journey when they dwelled in tents, or booths. Prophetically, the Passover symbolized the atonement of Christ; Pentecost symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit; and the Feast of Tabernacles symbolized the eternal dwelling place with God in the heavenly kingdom.

The spiritual symbolism of these festivals as applied to the New Testament family of God—the church—is shown in the following Scriptures, basically: the Passover (I Corinthians 5); Pentecost (Acts 2); and Tabernacles (John 14). There are many other Scriptures throughout the New Testament, of course, that develop these themes, but these are the most specific. The books of Romans and Hebrews give very thorough discussions of the relationship between Christ and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament Law. Each of these festivals is, of course, a type or figure of Christ. Christ is our Passover Lamb for atonement; He is the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to dwell within the believer; and He is the eternal abode or dwelling place spoken of in the fourteenth chapter of John.

Jesus would not have missed the Feast of Tabernacles because of personal peril. In fact, if He would honor the Law of Moses (which He did), He could not have missed the Feast of Tabernacles. His family, ever watchful for opportunities to embarrass Him, urged Him to go up to the feast publicly and there press His claims to the multitudes that would be there gathered. If indeed He was the Messiah (which they did not believe) it would seem to them that that would be the most logical place to make Himself known to the people. Jesus resisted their jibes. He had accepted His lot of being an absurdity to the world. His brothers

being of the world, His own sense of purpose and timing would always be in conflict with them. He continually warned His disciples that following Him would always put them at odds with those about them, even their families. There could be no compromise. Those who were of the world would never understand the meaning of the life of those who were the followers of Jesus.

Jesus went up to the feast later by Himself. He went secretly, not because He was afraid, but because there were those that were seeking to kill Him, and "His time had not yet come."

LESSON THIRTY - ONE

John 7:14-36

TRANSLATION

And the feast being already half over, Jesus went up unto the temple and taught. The Jews then were marveling saying, “How does this Man know letters, not having learned?” Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not mine, but the One who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the teaching whether it is of God, or I am speaking from Myself. He who is speaking from himself is seeking his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, this One is true and there is not unrighteousness in Him. Moses gave you the Law, did he not? And no one of you is practicing the Law. Why are you seeking to kill Me?” The crowd answered, “You have a demon; who is seeking to kill You?” Jesus answered and said to them, “I have done one work and all of you marvel. For this reason Moses gave you circumcision—not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers—and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I have made a man whole on the Sabbath? Do not judge on appearances, but judge right judgment.”

Certain of the Jerusalemites were saying then, “This is the One whom they are seeking to kill, is it not? And behold He is speaking boldly and no one is saying anything to Him. Is it possible that the rulers truly do not know that this is the Christ? But we know this One where He is from; but Christ, when He comes no one knows where He is from.” Jesus then called out in the temple, teaching and saying, “You both know Me and you know where I am from; and I have not come from Myself, but the One who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and that One sent Me.” They were seeking then to seize Him, and no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. And many of the crowd believed on Him, and were saying, “Whenever Christ comes, He will not do greater miracles than this One has done, will He?”

The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to seize Him. Jesus then said, “Yet a little while I am

with you and I go away to the One who sent Me. Ye shall seek Me and ye shall not find Me: and where I am, ye are not able to come.” The Jews then said to themselves, “Where is this One about to go that we will not find Him? He is not going to go unto the dispersion of the Greeks, is He; and to teach the Greeks? What is this word which He said, ‘You shall seek Me and you shall not find Me: and where I am you are not able to come?’”

COMMENTARY

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles—A Moment of Fulfillment for an Empty Festival

Of all the Jewish festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles was the most filled with promise. It was a festival of joy. The word “tabernacles” really means, “temporary dwelling.” It could be used either of a tent, or of a rough shelter made of boughs or wood. Perhaps the word “booth” is more descriptive, although that doesn’t quite fit, either. The occasion would be much like a festive “camp-out.” Every family would make a shelter out of olive branches, or palm branches, or pine or myrtle, with colorful decorations of various kinds. All of Jerusalem was filled with scents and sights and sounds that would lend to the joyful occasion. When God first instituted the feast through Moses, the children of Israel had just been delivered from Egypt and they were on the way to the Promised Land. Once in the Land, God did not want them to forget their deliverance from Egypt and this feast would remind them that they had dwelt in temporary shelters on their trek across the wilderness. It was, of course, a most joyful occasion when they first celebrated the feast upon entering the Holy Land. It was observed again with great gladness at the building of Solomon’s temple; again, at the rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel after the captivity; and yet a third time when Judas Maccabeus had driven out the Syrians and restored the

temple to the worship of Jehovah. In addition to this, the festival was to celebrate the “ingathering” of the harvest of wine and oil and corn in the autumn. The spiritual implications of the festival—the establishing of the spiritual or heavenly kingdom—would probably not have been understood by more than a few at that time. But this is the message that Jesus would ultimately have to convey to them. Prophetically, the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the most central truth for all of mankind—the dwelling place. What is man’s dwelling place now, and what shall it be in the future? The Bible very clearly points out that God’s intention is that man’s eternal dwelling place shall be with Himself. Just before going to the cross, Jesus said to His disciples, **“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; and if not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am there you may be also”** (John 14: 2, 3). And again, at the end of the book of Revelation, the whole purpose of redemption is summed up in the following words from the twenty-first chapter: **“And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, ‘Behold the dwelling of God is**

with men, and He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and shall be their God.”

In his first days upon the earth, man was the companion of God. He possessed a spirit that enabled him to relate thus directly to God. In his act of disobedience (commonly referred to as “the fall of man”) he lost this spiritual life which he had from God, and was separated from Him. He lost his eternal dwelling place. At that point God began a process of redemption which would ultimately restore man’s position with Himself. That is the central meaning of the entire Bible—the history of God’s redemptive purpose for man. In the book of Revelation the final curtain is drawn back and we are given a glimpse of the consummation of all things. In the end, God has succeeded in restoring man to his original state, and he will dwell with God forever.

It is most important to understand, however, that the dwelling place to which Jesus referred in the Gospels, and to which John referred in the book of Revelation, is Christ Himself. The word which Jesus used for dwelling place, *monai*, is the same word that He uses later on in the same address in the fourteenth chapter, where He refers to the indwelling presence of Himself within us. It is a “mutual abode.” We dwell in Him and He dwells in us in the presence of His Holy Spirit. It is Christ who is our eternal dwelling place, and not buildings. In the future, when we receive our “glorified bodies” we will no longer be prisoners of space and time. Therefore, to think of our eternal dwelling place with God in terms of earthly mansions is to miss the whole point of our spiritual capacity to identify with God throughout eternity. Actually, mansions, as we know them on the earth,

would be a handicap to our thorough enjoyment of the much deeper realities of a spiritual existence. That does not mean that Heaven will be any the less a real place to dwell, but it is a matter of emphasis. If we are looking forward to Heaven merely as a “lovely place to live,” I am afraid that we have missed the grander implications of our spiritual dwelling place with God. The temporary shelters, which the Jewish people constructed for the Feast of Tabernacles, were quite in keeping with this concept. It speaks of the fact that our dwelling upon earth is a very temporary thing, while we look for the eternal abode in the very presence of God Himself.

The spiritual symbolism of the “ingathering” or the final harvest of corn, olive oil and wine, refers to the final harvest in terms of God’s redemptive purpose for mankind. The New Testament has many references to this harvest time. Notably, the parables of Jesus speak of this theme. The end of the age is seen as harvest time. The thousands of years of God’s patient sowing and cultivating will at last bring forth fruit, and God will have His harvest of souls.

The majority of the Jews living at that time had long since lost sight of the deeper implications of the festivals and to them these gatherings were, for the most part, empty symbols. As with most holidays, the celebration becomes an end in itself and the reason for the celebration is lost in the lure of the festival. But to a faithful remnant of God’s people, it was a sacred and precious occasion. To Jesus, quite aware of the larger meaning of the feasts, it was even more precious and more sacred. He chose this occasion to reveal yet another dimension of His divinity. Each of the Jewish festivals was itself a type of Christ. The Passover was a type of Christ as the Lamb of God; the feast of Pentecost was a type of Christ

as the Holy Spirit; the Feast of Tabernacles was a type of Christ, our dwelling place and the fulfillment of our joy and peace. To those who sensed the emptiness and

disillusionment of the occasion, Jesus would offer Himself as the “River of Living Water” to satisfy the thirsty souls.