

John 7:10-36 (continued)

At the Feast—Dialogues with the Doubters

To the Jew of Jesus' day nothing was more central to life than religion. To their forefathers—Abraham, Moses, David, for example—the content of that religion was a deep and vital interaction with God. By the time Jesus had come to the earth, the Jewish religion had become so encumbered with the **“traditions of the elders”** that God had become merely a vague reference point obscured by layers of ritual and regulation. Still, the Jew found his roots in those regulations and clung as tenaciously to its tenets as to life itself. While the essential realities of faith were gone as far as God was concerned, there was nothing to replace it until Jesus came. Certainly the Jewish people, and even some of the Pharisees, were sincere in their blind devotion to the traditions.

The Apostle Paul is a very good example of this. His devotion went to the extent of participating in the death of Christians for the sake of God. In chapter three of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he gives some very revealing insights into the attitude of the devout Jew: **“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not have confidence in the flesh, even if also I have had confidence in the flesh. If one thinks another to have confidence in the flesh, I rather: circumcised the eighth day; of the family of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as far as the Law is concerned a Pharisee;**

as far as zeal is concerned, persecuting the church; as far as the righteousness which is in the Law is concerned, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I account as loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3:3-7). In these lines Paul reveals both the extent of his devotion to the Jewish traditions, and his realization of their emptiness. He was a devout Jew and a faultless Pharisee; but the Holy Spirit had penetrated his blindness and revealed to him that his own righteousness was not adequate to meet the requirement of God, and that he would have to take within him the very righteousness of Christ. Thus Paul gives to us a true appraisal of the inadequacy of the Jewish religion in spite of the sincerity and devotion of its followers.

Such was the mood that Jesus confronted at the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the highlight of the year. The festival was bright; the Jews were merry. If their religion was empty and unsatisfying, this was certainly not the time nor the place to introduce that fact. But Jesus did introduce it. His very presence at the feast had a disturbing effect upon His fellow countrymen. Jesus' appeal was always Spirit to spirit. If the spirit was open to God, Jesus would be received; if not, He would be despised. No one could totally ignore Him.

Thus it was that Jesus became embroiled in bitter debate at a festival which was

intended to be a time of good cheer. He had gone quietly to the feast, not intending to stir up strife, but everywhere and inexorably the enemy must be confronted. No opportunity escaped the adversary in his relentless pursuit of the Son of God. The most persistent objective of Satan was, of course, to discredit Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. On this issue rests the validity of the entire process of redemption. How did Jesus respond? To follow this debate will give us some insight into our own handling of this question both for ourselves and for others.

At the outset the Jews were impressed by Jesus' knowledge of the Law. He had not been trained in the rabbinic schools. To the Jews, anyone not so trained was unlettered or ignorant. Jesus replies that His teaching has come from God. Anyone who really wants to follow God, will understand this—they will sense it in their spirits. This provides us with an extremely important principle in our own pursuit of the truth. No amount of human reasoning or logic can verify God to us, unless we are truly willing to receive Him. In our dealings with others, we can take a cue here from Jesus. It is not our place to prove to anyone the truth of God. It is ours to declare the truth; it is God's to penetrate the heart and bring belief.

Another clue is provided in Jesus' motive. **“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him, this One is true and there is not unrighteousness in Him.”** With brilliant hindsight, we observe that few men have affected the process of human history as Jesus has. And over the centuries since His death and resurrection, He has attracted hundreds of millions of followers. But at the time that Jesus was thus engaging the Jews, it

seemed an even chance that He would receive little more for His struggles than an inglorious death. His questioners had at first denied and then finally admitted that He was marked for death. Jesus' situation was in sharp contrast to the Pharisees, who moved in splendor and **“loved the praise of men.”** It would be obvious to those whose hearts were open, that Jesus was certainly not seeking His own glory.

Always, the issue of blindness and hypocrisy seemed to surface in the sea of religious traditions which engulfed Israel. Jesus had performed a remarkable miracle. Sometimes the Pharisees, themselves, admitted that “notable miracles had been done.” But the miracle had been performed on the Sabbath.

Completely blind to the fact that the miracles performed by Jesus were God's sign that this was indeed the Messiah, they criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. They obviously had accepted the fact that this was a true miracle, because otherwise they would not have seen something as having happened on the Sabbath. Jesus' words over the sick man would have been regarded as merely “mumbo-jumbo.” They were, in Jesus' words, **“gagging on a gnat, and swallowing a camel.”** The hypocrisy of the situation was pointed up by Jesus when He reminded them that they performed the rite of circumcision on the Sabbath. They took the liberty of engaging in a religious exercise that provided for the spiritual welfare of the individual, but took exception to His providing for physical welfare. The shallowness of their judgment was obvious.

Again, the blindness of the Jews is demonstrated by their inability to see anything more in Jesus than His physical, or natural aspects. Even the Pharisee,

Nicodemus, trained in the fullest possible sense, a religious leader, had to be taught the meaning of seeing things with the eyes of the spirit. Jesus had said to him, **“Unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of heaven.”** It was true that these Jews had known Jesus in the flesh. They knew when and where He was born, where He lived, and who His brothers and sisters and parents were. But they had not the slightest notion of the meaning of the Spirit that possessed Jesus. It was that inner Spirit of Jesus that had been with God and had been sent from God; and indeed was God Himself. This aspect of Jesus could only be seen by eyes enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Over and over again, in Jesus’ discussion with the Jews, He presses the point that there is no way to truly know Him as the Messiah and the Son of God unless the eyes are enlightened by the Spirit to see what God sees.

As always, the words of Jesus cut through the veneer and pierced the heart. No one can escape the searchlight of the Word from the Holy Spirit. The response is decisive. Many believed on Him and some wanted to kill Him. The chief priests and Pharisees, who should have led the people in the acceptance of the Messiah, instead became the architects of murder, and led them in the violating of the very commandments that had been the foundation of their religious system. The soldiers could not touch Him because **“His hour had not yet come.”**

Further evidence of sightless spiritual eyes comes in the confusion that the Jews experienced over Jesus’ statement that He was going back to the One who sent Him. They did not have the slightest idea of what He was talking about.

In today’s world, where the scientific method reigns supremely over the process of knowledge, the dialogue which Jesus had with the Jews provides an important insight into the attitude with which one must approach the knowledge of the Son of God. No human system of knowledge is adequate to prove the existence of God. The great debate today is between the “naturalists” and “supernaturalists.” The naturalist says that there is nothing beyond nature. To him, the mind is the measure of all things. That which cannot be verified by the human thought processes simply does not exist. The supernaturalist says that there is a realm beyond human thought process which is knowable; but the knowledge of this realm is beyond the range of the scientific method. To some, such as the oriental mystics, this realm is explored by the chance application of psychic processes that reach beyond normal sense experience. To the follower of Christ, this realm can only be explored through the revelation of God. God alone can reveal Himself to man. In this process the mind is useful; but only as a instrument through which the Spirit of God can bring understanding to the individual. (For a further discussion of this subject, see the author’s pamphlet, *Reality and Revelation*.)

In Jesus’ dialogue with the Pharisees, He made no effort to prove His identity through the process of human reason. He put a heavy emphasis upon the will to believe and promised that if one really wanted to believe, there would be the capacity to believe. In His presentation in other places we assume that He is referring to the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about faith. In other words, a sincere pursuit of truth with a heart open to God will bring the response from God that is necessary to enable the individual to believe. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus

said, **“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asks, receives; and he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened”** (Matthew 7:7, 8). The terms of reconciliation with God are simple. If it required a philosophical mind, or the capacity to reason, or the capacity even to read, great numbers of people would be left

out. But the plain teaching of Scripture is that even the child, coming to God in sincere desire will not be turned away. In the book of Hebrews we read, **“But without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”** (11:6).

John 7:37-52

TRANSLATION

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." But this He said concerning the Spirit which those who believed on Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Some of the crowd then having heard these words were saying, "This is truly the prophet"; others were saying, "This is the Christ"; but some were saying, "Christ does not come out of Galilee does He? The Scripture said, did it not, that [He would be] of the seed of David, and Christ comes from the village of Bethlehem where David was?" There was a division then among the crowd on account of Him. And certain of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands upon Him.

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees and those men said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" The officers answered, "No man has spoken thus." The Pharisees then answered them, "You are not also deceived are you? Not any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him did they? But this crowd which does not know the law is under the curse of God." Nicodemus said to them, he who came formerly [to Jesus], being one of them, "Our law does not judge the man, does it, except it hear from him first and know what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "You are not also of the Galilean, are you? Search and see, because out of Galilee there does not arise a prophet."

COMMENTARY

After the Arid Wilderness—The Living Water

The Feast of Tabernacles was coming to a close. For seven days, the celebrants had lived in temporary shelters, reminding them of their wilderness journey. On the

eighth day there was a "Holy Convocation" commemorating their arrival in the Promised Land. After the dry and barren wilderness they would be surrounded with

water and food—"a land flowing with milk and honey." On each of the seven days prior to the Day of Convocation, water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher and carried to the temple, reminding them of the water that had come forth from the rock in the desert. In the temple courtyard the water was poured into a silver basin on the side of the altar and carried by pipes down into the brook Kidron outside the temple walls. This was discontinued on the eighth day, because once in the land, the children of Israel would partake of the natural springs of water that were there in abundance.

Whether it was the seventh day of the week of feasts, or the eighth day of Holy Convocation, is not certain; but on one of these days, the ritual of the water having come to an end, Jesus stood forth and lifted up His voice in a clarion call to the assembled crowd: **"If any one thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."** In the ancient day, the parched people of God had been refreshed by the wellsprings of the Promised Land. The desert odyssey had ended. But, the physical needs of the children of Israel having been met, they fell into the careless spiritual disintegration that often accompanies material abundance. So once again it was the wasteland—but this time of the spirit. By the time Jesus came to walk with the people of God, their souls were parched and barren. The feast days with all their ceremonies and pageantry, provided but scant moisture for a moment. Perhaps the trickle of water from the Pool of Siloam had struck a cord in Jesus as He compared it with the **"rivers in the desert"** and **"unfailing springs"** promised in Isaiah to the people of God. **"Behold I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth;**

shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19).

The prophecies of Isaiah had a dual meaning—physical and spiritual. Physically, God had told His people that He was going to allow them to be taken captive by their enemies as a result of their disobedience; they would have many hundreds of years of affliction and wandering, but would ultimately be returned to their own land where once again God would bring the abundant blessing that He had promised them before. The spiritual meaning is equally clear. Their barren souls would become like a watered garden. **"And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not"** (Isaiah 58:11). Ezekiel repeats this prophecy, and makes the spiritual application more specifically. **"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them"** (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

The physical fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy must wait for some time, but as Jesus stepped forth in the midst of that festival crowd in the Holy City, He knew that the time was at hand for the spiritual fulfillment. Israel was about to be swept with the floodtide of divine grace, and Jesus, even now, was offering that refreshing to all who would receive it.

John 7:37-52 (continued)

In the Heart—The River of Life

“He who believes on Me, even as the Scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of Living Water.” Jesus’ personal invitation **“to come”** was not new. To the Jews, however, it was absurd that this “carpenter of Nazareth” should make such an offer. The offer, of course, implied that He had the power to fulfill it. It would have been absurd to any reasonable person. Seen through the eyes of the flesh, it was as though the neighborhood baker should say to a customer, “I’m giving you this physical bread, but if you would ask me, I would give you the bread of life.” Or if the plumber should say, “I am fixing your pipes, but if you really want to know the truth I am able to give you spiritual life.” Only the Holy Spirit could make it possible for the Jews to accept Jesus as the Son of God and to receive His offer of “Living Water.” It is so today. Only the Holy Spirit can give one the power to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and to receive His invitation to come to Him for life.

What now is it that Jesus is actually offering to these people? In practical, everyday terms, what does He mean by the Living Water? The answer is readily found in the next verse: **But this He said concerning the spirit...**The Living Water then, is the Holy Spirit. The promise is that the Holy Spirit will come into our innermost being and become the source of life—life that flows endlessly from God Himself. The Jews had the Law, but they did not have

life. Paul said, **“For the letter [Law] kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** (II Corinthians 3:6). The truth, so simple that a child may understand it, is that anyone who wants endless life with God, needs only to ask the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, to come in. When the Spirit comes in, life will flow endlessly in the human heart, like a river. This does not mean that one will always be happy or full of ecstasy. In the flesh, one will always have struggles, but in the spirit, life and joy and peace will flow like a river.

“For the Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Jesus was the earthly vehicle through whom God made Himself known to the world. It would have been impossible for man to ever have a relationship to God without such a mediator. God had to be translated into human terms so that man could understand and appropriate Him. While the physical body of Jesus was of earthly nature, He was fully possessed of the Spirit of God. There was never a moment when He did not have the fullness of God within Him; from the time of conception within the womb of Mary until He gave up the Spirit in His death upon the cross. At the resurrection, the body of Jesus, now glorified, was united with His Spirit for eternity. Now, forever, Jesus will sit upon the throne as Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God “slain from the foundation of the world.”

In addition to making God known to man, Jesus was also the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He became the eternal sacrifice, forever ending the alienation between God and man. While Jesus was on the earth in the flesh, there was a limit to His ministry to the spirit of man. He could declare the truth of God, and work the miracles of God, but He could not, at that point, dwell within the very person of the believers. That is why He said to His disciples, **“I tell you the truth, it is necessary for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Comforter [divine helper] will not come to you; but if I go away I will send Him to you”** (John 16:7). After Jesus had been glorified, He sent His Spirit to dwell within the hearts of His followers. Now the Law would be written, not upon tables of stone, but on the heart. That is, the very heart or “mind,” of Christ would be within every believer so that the intentions and interests of Christ would become the intentions and interests of His people. Paul said to the Corinthians: **“But we have the mind of Christ”** (II Corinthians 2:16).

Everyone who wants to be reconciled to God, or “saved,” must take within him the Spirit of Christ. This is what it means to be

“born again.” It is obvious that the matter of sin must be considered. No one will seek the “Lamb of God,” unless he sees also his own sinfulness. Those who try to come directly to God apart from the consideration of such need, will have ignored the sacrifice of Christ, and **“crucified Him afresh”** (Hebrews 6). Again, **“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sins]”** (Hebrews 9:22). How vital had been the declaration of Jesus on that great day of the feast! It was no less than God’s offer of eternal life to a dying world!

The impact of Jesus’ words had been such that even the officers who had been sent from the chief priests and Pharisees to bring Jesus to them, were so affected that they could not comply with that request. The Pharisees were furious at the officers; accusing them of being deceived; but even one of their own members, Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus by night, and been affected by Him, rose in support of Jesus.

As usual the words of Jesus had brought sharp division. No one ever confronts Jesus lightly. One must either surrender all to Him, or go away.

John 8:1-11

TRANSLATION

*And Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And in the morning again He arrived at the temple, and all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them. And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and stood her in the midst and said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. Moses commanded us in the Law to stone such a woman: You then, what do you say?" And they were saying this, tempting Him, that they might have an accusation against Him. And Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. And as they continued questioning Him, He stood up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And again He stooped and wrote on the ground. And they who heard were going away one by one beginning from the elders, and He was left alone, and the woman in the midst. And Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one, Sir." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no longer from now on" **

COMMENTARY

Jesus and the Adulterous Woman—The Encounter Between Sin and Savior

The great human crisis with which Jesus must continually contend, is sin. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, thousands of years before, had unleashed forces of evil that would plague the earth and its inhabitants century after century to the very day of Christ's coming into the world. God had made abundant provision for forgiveness and restoration, but the scars would remain and the crippling effect upon human nature would leave the people of earth in a position of constant dependency upon God for their strength. The human nature, incurable affected by this evil force, could never again be depended upon, by

itself, to function in the perfections with which it was originally endowed. In order to better come to grips with the episode of the adulterous woman, it is important for us to consider in more detail, this matter of sin.

There are a great many facets to the word "sin." It is neither profitable nor necessary to analyze the word too technically, or philosophically. The question of course is one of usage. How was the term used in the Bible, and how do we use it today? Generally speaking the word, as used in the Bible, either refers to misdeeds, or to the attitude of mind of which the misdeeds are

really a symptom. Whether we are talking about attitudes or actions, the idea of sin can only be meaningful as set over against the idea of God. Sin has to do with offending God. There are many words that apply to the idea of offending God [trespass, transgression, lawlessness, evil, wickedness, iniquity] but they all add up to the same thing, that is, going against standards which have been accepted as belonging to God. Socially, of course, there is a great deal of difference between the attitude and the deed, but as far as offending God is concerned, the attitude and the deed are the same. That is why the Law failed. While it controlled the actions, it did not do anything for the attitude—the heart remained the same. By human standards, sin is primarily in the deed. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made God's attitude abundantly clear. It was not enough to keep the Law if the heart was not right. The Sermon on the Mount was not presented by Jesus as a stricter law; it was an effort to show the impossibility of human beings to satisfy the righteous requirement of God. Only the power of God, transforming the human spirit into its original divine likeness, could make possible the restoration of man to his original harmony with the holiness of God. This recovery would be made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection. As a result of the death and resurrection of Christ, the very Spirit of Christ would come to enter the heart or spirit of everyone who would receive Him.

Thus, sin only has significance in terms of the relationship between God and man. It has to do with offending God either in attitude or action. Even the offending of one's fellow man can be regarded as sin; insofar as, to offend one of God's creatures is to offend the God whose image he bears.

And thus, there is no way to define sin apart from God. To accept the biblical concept of sin is to accept the biblical account of creation and the Fall. For man to be culpable, or guilty, before God requires the possibility of pleasing God to begin with. To meet God's standards, man, of course, had to be like Him. In the original account of creation, we are told that God **“breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”** The Hebrew word for breath here implies the very Spirit of God Himself. This did not make man equal with God, but rather made him enough like God to be in harmony with His holiness. If man was originally capable of following God, and elected not to, then there must have been some force of evil present as a negative influence. This, of course, does coincide with the account of man's disobedience and subsequent fall. It would be important at this point to read the first three chapters of Genesis to familiarize oneself with the complete narrative. In the third chapter, we have the introduction of one called Satan. We learn from other passages of the Bible (Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28) that this being had been in a position of power and glory with God in the beginning of creation. As a result of an ambitious effort to usurp God's power, Satan was cast out of Heaven, and became an evil force disrupting the earth. The original man and woman were successfully enticed by Satan, to disobey God. In submitting to Satan, they became affected in their spirits to such a degree that they lost their power of direct communion with God, resulting in death of their spirit. They did not die immediately, as far as their physical and mental functions were concerned; but they became subject to physical death and did immediately suffer a death of sorts in their spirits. In some way the genetic process was so affected that the human race suffered a permanent damage. From that time on, the direction of man's heart and purpose would be away from God rather than toward Him. According to Romans 8, even nature has

come under subjection to this evil force, resulting in natural catastrophes and distortions throughout the world. There is

nothing more certain in the world than the presence of evil. The Bible offers a very credible account of its origin.

*The episode of the adulterous woman does not appear in all of the ancient manuscripts. For this reason some commentaries leave it out or give it only a slight reference. Dr. Bruce Metzger of Princeton, who is one of the most eminent Greek scholars in the world (and incidentally a friend and teacher of the author), together with his committee who edited the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies, believed that while it may not be certain that John actually included this story, yet it has enough historical validity to it and is enough in keeping with the known attitudes and teachings of Jesus, that its traditional place should be preserved where it is in John's Gospel.

John 8:1-11 (continued)

The Adulterous Woman—Of Guilt and Grace

And now Jesus, who will be God's sacrifice for sin, confronts a prime example of the implications of sin in the world. A woman has been caught in the very act of adultery by some religious leaders of that day. They bristle with indignation as they drag her before the Master. The Pharisees, who brought her, were not looking to Jesus for leadership. They had no intention of following His judgment. They were rather seeking to embarrass and entrap Him. If Jesus condemned the woman He would be going against the whole tenor of His ministry; which was the proclaiming of mercy. If He did not condemn her He would be guilty of indifference to the Law. It was a farce, and Jesus knew it. The Pharisees certainly would not have appealed to a young vagabond to judge a matter of the Law. And as far as the Law of Moses was concerned, they had long since abandoned it in its original statement in favor of their own Talmuds. And, as a matter of fact, stoning was no longer the accepted penalty for adultery. Jesus stooped and wrote on the ground and ignored them. To speculate on what He wrote is futile as well as unsound. If it were important we would have been told. They kept pressing. They would not be denied their moment of sport. It was a mistake on their part; they should have left. Jesus had the Sword of the Spirit and He skewered them on the spot: **"He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone."** One by one they quietly crept away. As always they had utterly failed to see the meaning of the

situation. Their concept of sin, like their grasp of the Law, was hopelessly inadequate. To the Pharisee, sin had to do with specific acts that were in violation of specific written Laws. The attitude behind the action was as unimportant to them as was the attitude without the action. That is why the Laws as expressed in the Talmuds, had become such a cumbersome and unwieldy thing with thousands of details that spelled out exactly the requirements. It was not that they wanted the more to please God, but lacking the Spirit of God in their hearts, they did not have any idea of what to do in a given situation without a written statement. Jesus taught that the root of sin was in the heart; the deed was only a symptom. It was not that the deed was unimportant (there are many reasons for not committing the deed), but rather that the one who intends the deed is no more holy than the one who commits it. The implication of Jesus' teaching was that all the world was really guilty before God—that there was none righteous. The admission of guilt was essential for the application of grace and forgiveness. The covering of guilt would only keep one from receiving the needed help. This is why Jesus had said, **"They that are whole do not need a physician, but they that are sick...I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners"** (Matthew 9:12, 13). Jesus had not come to broaden the scope of penalty, but to broaden the scope of recovery. In the exposed abscess of the adulterous woman's guilt, there was the

opportunity of divine pardon and healing. In the hidden malice of the Pharisee's heart, there was only the spreading of infection.

And then, there was only Jesus and the woman. **"Where are your accusers? Doesn't anyone condemn you?" "No one, Sir." "And neither do I."** He had turned the farce around. The ploy was perfect. The Pharisees were the greatest showmen on earth. In the robes they wore, in the religious acts they performed, in fasting and feasting, they always wanted to be seen of men and applauded for charity and nobility; for piety and humility. Now Jesus would give them their chance: **"He that is without sin..."**. Whatever they thought of Jesus; whatever they thought of the woman; there was not one Pharisee who could dare to pick up a rock and thus say to the assembled crowd, "I am sinless." It would have shattered the facade of humility so artfully contrived.

"Go and do not sin anymore from now on." At face value, such a demand upon this fallen woman seems absurd. Throughout all the ages of time, the people of God have wrestled with this problem of sin. How in the world can this sinful woman reverse all her habits of life in a moment of time? The answer to this question is crucial. If Jesus really said this, and if we cannot find a satisfactory explanation of it, then the whole issue of the practicality of Jesus' teaching stands in doubt. The demands of the Sermon on the Mount, and many other of Jesus' teachings, seem quite beyond the capacity of ordinary individuals.

The very absurdity of the request really provides the clue to the problem. It belongs in the same category as the Sermon on the Mount, and the request to the rich young ruler that he **"sell all that he has and**

give it to the poor." The encounter with the rich young ruler is related in Luke 18. A wealthy young man had come to Jesus to inquire of the way to eternal life. In response to Jesus' questioning, he indicated that he had really fulfilled all the requirements of the Law already, and wanted to know what else he had to do. Jesus told him to go and sell all his possessions and give to the poor and come and follow Him. The young man went away sorrowing because of what seemed to him an insurmountable barrier. Jesus did not run after him to soften the requirement. There was a very special reason for making it stiff. He wanted the young man to know that it was, in fact, totally beyond his capacity to inherit eternal life. Later on He gave this clue to the disciples, who were astonished at the demands. Jesus followed it up by an even more startling statement that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven." There is no justification from the Greek text in changing the figure of speech here. Some have said that this really referred to a special gate that the camels had to go under in Jerusalem, but to soften the figure does away with it completely. Jesus is trying to show the impossibility of any man satisfying the requirements of the Law apart from God. The disciples asked, **"Who then can be saved?"** Jesus said, **"The things that are impossible with man are possible with God."** The adulterous woman, like the rich young ruler, would find it impossible to comply with the righteous requirements of God. She would need a Savior.

In the case of the young ruler, it was certainly not Jesus' intention to drive him away. The young man had been very bold in his confidence about keeping the Law. Like the Pharisees, he had kept the letter, but missed the heart, as indicated by his

attachment to his possessions. The text says that Jesus loved him. He could not let him continue in his illusions. He would never inherit eternal life apart from the power and pardon of God. And he would never seek that power, until he came to the realization of his own impotence in fulfilling the Law. In His dealing with the adulterous woman, Jesus made it quite clear that He was not condoning her conduct, or being too casual about sin. Indeed, He was more conscious of its seriousness than the Pharisees, who thought they could handle it themselves. As with the young ruler, Jesus wanted this woman to come to the place where she realized that apart from Him she was helpless.

Adultery, of course, is a serious offense, but so also is any disregard for the will of God. The attitude of the Pharisees was as offensive to God as the actions of the woman. The episode of the encounter between Jesus and the sinful woman teaches us the following:

1. That all the world is guilty before God;
2. That sin is not merely a matter of action, but also of attitude;
3. That God deals with the world of sinners in grace and forgiveness;
4. That God does not condone sin, but rather wants the sinner to understand his helplessness in the struggle against it.

John 8:12-30

TRANSLATION

Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness at all, but shall have the Light of life." The Pharisees then said to Him, "You testify concerning Yourself; Your testimony is not true." Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I testify concerning Myself, My testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I am coming from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh, I do not judge anything. And if I judge, My judgment is trustworthy; because I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies concerning Myself and the Father who sent Me testifies concerning Me." They were then saying to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would have known My Father also." These words He spoke in the treasury while teaching in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come. He said then again to them, I am going away and you will seek Me, and you will die in your sins. Where I am going you are not able to come." The Jews then were saying, "He will not kill Himself will He?" because He was saying, "Where I am going you are not able to come." And He was saying to them, "You are from that which is below [earthly], I am from that which is above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I said then to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins." They were then saying to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus said to them, "[I am] what I was speaking to you from the beginning. I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you; but He who sent Me is true, and that which I have heard from Him these things I am speaking in the world." They did not know that the Father was speaking to them. Jesus then said, "Whenever you shall lift up the Son of Man then you shall know that I am, and I do nothing from Myself, but even as the Father has taught Me these things I am speaking. And He who sent Me is with me; He has not left Me alone, because I do always the things which please Him." While He was saying these things, many believed on Him.

COMMENTARY

More Dialogue with the Pharisee—The Light of the World Encounters the Darkness

The dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees continues. Now He makes a sweeping statement that lifts Him to a place of authority; far above His persistent adversaries. At issue is truth and reality. There is no room here for theological game-playing. The Pharisees were hopelessly entangled in tradition and trivia. To these blind leaders of the blind, Jesus said, **“I am the Light of the world.”** He was not merely claiming to have the light, but to *be* the Light itself. No religious leader past or present had dared to make such a claim. Such absurd statements as this from religious leaders would tend more to destroy credibility than to build it, and would attract a following only from the lunatic fringe at best. But Jesus spoke with the boldness and authority that can only reflect the complete confidence that He spoke the truth.

Jesus was here claiming to be the source of all light. In order to make this claim, He had to identify Himself as God. This, of course, is in keeping with the first chapter of John’s Gospel. Here Jesus is identified as the incarnation of Christ, the Word (*Logos*). That is, He is the very Spirit of God, who took upon Him a fleshly form. Thus, Jesus is in reality the Christ, the Creator of the universe. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says of Christ, **“By Him all things were created both in heaven and upon earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things were created through Him and for His sake, and He Himself is before all things and by Him all things hold together”** (Colossians 1:16, 17). Before time began, all that existed was the eternal Spirit of God.

When God set in motion time and space, He expressed Himself in creation through the agency of Christ, the *Logos*, who was the living revelation of Himself. God expressed Himself in creation as Christ. In turn, Christ became manifest in the flesh in the person of Jesus. Since Christ, the agent in creation, can be said to be the source of light, it is quite appropriate for Jesus to make this claim. In other words, Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, that He is indeed the creator of the world.

There are some who say that Jesus did not, Himself, claim to be God, but that His followers made this claim for Him. But, it is obvious that the Jewish leaders understood Him to make this claim, because that is why they crucified Him. Thus, the crucifixion stands as the silent testimony through the ages that Jesus did Himself claim to be God.

But what is the full implication of Jesus’ statement, **“I am the Light of the world.”** Light is energy, and energy is the essence of the universe. Energy must have a source, and Jesus is claiming to be that source. Shortly, Jesus would return to His original glory, and send His Spirit to dwell within the hearts of men. At this point, the very energy of God through which the universe was created, would be within the hearts of His people. **“And what is the surpassing majesty of His power unto us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strength, with which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead...”** (Ephesians 1:19, 20). The presence of the Spirit of Christ within us, then becomes our Light. **“Because God who said, ‘Light shine out of darkness,’**

is the One who has shined in our hearts with the shining forth of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 4:6).

In the quest for truth, there must be an authority. In fact, there must be more than authority; there must be also the power to convince the heart of truth, and to apply it in the world of reality. The very presence in our hearts of Christ, the Light of the world provides this. **“He that followeth Me...”**—where Jesus goes; the Light goes. If we have the Spirit of Christ in our hearts we have Light within us continuously. If we want to live in the Light, we must take the Spirit of Christ into our hearts. We do not then have to pray for Light; we have the Light. One of the most beautiful texts in Scripture is in I John 1:7: **“If we walk in the Light as He is in the Light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”** To have fellowship with Christ is the most marvelous thing on the earth. There is a refreshing simplicity in the way the

Scripture offers this truth. It is not a complex matter of learning many religious ideas, or becoming a philosopher, or spending long years in pursuit of knowledge; it is simply to ask the Spirit of Christ to come into the heart. It is so easy and simple that a child can participate. Indeed, when it is made too complicated, the whole point of Scripture is missed. Part of the fragmentation in the church today is the result of making the matter too complicated.

In Jesus’ direct claims to the Pharisees, we have the following truths:

1. Jesus is the source of all Light and therefore identified with the creation of the universe;
2. As the Light of the world, He is the ultimate authority for all truth;
3. His Light is available to all who will receive it;
4. No one who follows Him will walk in darkness.

John 8:12-30 (continued)

And Yet More Dialogue—The Test for Truth

In their debates with Jesus, the Pharisees were hopelessly bogged down in the mudhole of human reason. The mind is a superb instrument for the receiving and dispatching of communications. In some respects, however, it is as limited as the modern computer. This incredible achievement of modern science can only function in keeping with the data that is fed into it. If the data is faulty, the results will be faulty. As a decision-making instrument, the human brain is hopelessly crippled by the accumulation of half-truths, prejudices, misinformation, misunderstanding, misconceptions, and gaps in knowledge.

The brain is like a great filing system, storing up millions of tiny fragments of experience and knowledge and conscious involvement in the things of life. Every experience that we have, that we are conscious of, gets stored up in the cortex of the brain as a permanent record. Every subsequent experience that we have is classified and interpreted in terms of the accumulated knowledge in that filing system. Thus, if one's earliest experiences with dogs, for example, should be unpleasant, that information goes into the filing system under the category of dogs. Unless the information is modified by later and happier experiences, one's attitude toward dogs would always be negative. This is true, of course, in every realm of human experience. If we should get false information, (as often we do in the propaganda techniques employed by

various segments of our society—political, social, commercial), that data will remain in the filing system unchanged, unless we have additional modifying information. In every decision-making process, our brain is continually picking up on data that may be false or misleading. It is obvious, then, that the chances of making truly sound judgments are very, very limited. The Bible declares human wisdom to be foolishness in the Light of God's wisdom. In his letter to the people of Corinth, Paul shows the inadequacy of the human mind to appropriate and understand the truth of God, without the help of God's Spirit within. This statement of Paul's is so important to the discussion here that we're going to quote a large section of his words. **“For the word of the cross is to those who perish foolishness; but to those of us who are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will bring to nothing the understanding of those who understand.’ Where is wisdom? Where is the lettered one? Where is the inquirer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believed; since also the Jews asked for a sign and the Greeks seek wisdom. But we are preaching Christ as crucified; to the Jews, on the one hand an offense and to the**

Gentiles foolishness. But to them who are called, both Jews and Greek, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many wellborn; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to bring to disgrace the wise, and the weak things of the world God has chosen that He may dishonor the strong, and the illborn of the world and the things that are nothing. God has chosen, indeed, the things that are not, in order that He may render useless the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God. For of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, in order that even as it is written, ‘He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord’”(I Corinthians 1:18-31). Only through the Spirit of God can we come to know the truth of God. The human brain is so limited by prejudice, misinformation, and half-truths and ignorance, that it cannot hope to find God unaided.

With this in mind, we return to the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is, of course, a question of truth. Who is right? Who is wrong? Where does the authority come from? Who has the authority? The Pharisees claim to be from God. Jesus tells them that if they were from God, they would know that He was God’s anointed Messiah. The Pharisees remind Him that He has no witnesses—He is only testifying for Himself. “Wrong,” says Jesus, “The Father also bears witness concerning Me.” With a vicious reference to a rumor about the circumstances of Jesus’ birth, the

Pharisees ask Him where His Father is. Jesus counters with a startling statement, **“If you had known Me you would have known My Father also.”** Clearly, Jesus is here identifying Himself as not only from the Father but the very Father Himself. The statement, if not absolutely true, would have been utter blasphemy—the very kind of blasphemy of which He was accused later on at His trial, and for which He was crucified. Why did the Jews not lay hold of Him at this time? The text says that **“No one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”**

The dialogue continues. Jesus strikes blow after blow. He now tells the Jews that if they do not believe on Him they will die in their sins. It is obvious that God has His own time for the crucifixion. The things that Jesus was saying should have brought upon His head all the fury of the Sanhedrin, long before the actual crucifixion did take place. God Himself had stayed their hand. Only the conviction of absolute truth and the confidence that He was indeed the Messiah, could have given Jesus the boldness to speak as He did in front of those who could, in a moment, be His executioners. In response to their further questioning, Jesus declares that all that He has to say in the world He receives from the Father. He puts Himself in a place of submission to God. He declares that what He speaks has been given to Him from the Father and that He always lives to please the Father.

But how can this be? How is it that He can at one moment claim to be the Father, and the next moment claim to be in submission to the Father? We have already discussed this at length in chapter 5, but we will speak of it again briefly here. The body of Jesus, including the brain and nervous system, was, in every respect, a truly

human body. But, the human person of Jesus was completely filled with the Spirit of God. There never was a moment from the original conception that the Spirit of God was not present in the physical body of Jesus. Thus, in Spirit, Jesus was indeed the Father. But, His natural body had to develop physically as any human person, and His natural mind had to be trained and taught as any human mind. The Spirit of the Father in Him was in direct control of that developing process. And Jesus, having a mind that was not affected by the fall of man, was in a position to perfectly please the Spirit of the Father within Him. It can be said, then, that God the Father actually prepared and shaped an image of Himself

who walked the earth in the person of Jesus. The Spirit of God in Jesus communicated to His mind the things that He wanted Him to know. In the same sense, although not in the same measure, the Spirit of God dwells in the believer. The Spirit at all times knows all things, but He does not communicate to our human mind all that He knows. He reveals to us the things that He wants us to understand as He is ready to do it. Thus, Jesus could say on the one hand, **“I do nothing from Myself, but even as the Father taught Me, these things I speak;”** and on the other hand, **“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”**

John 8:31-36

TRANSLATION

Jesus then was saying to the Jews who had believed on Him, "If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are the seed of Abraham and we have never been in bondage to anyone; how do You say that you shall be free?" Jesus answered them, "I tell you the absolute truth that everyone who practices sin is the slave of sin. But the slave does not remain in the house forever; the Son remains forever. If then the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

COMMENTARY

Truth and Freedom vs. Bondage and Lies

The power of the Spirit in the words of Jesus broke through the barriers of blindness and error, and a number of the Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It would have been a very difficult decision. To go against the express attitudes of their religious leaders, and believe instead, One who from all outward appearances was but a simple vagabond, could have been accomplished by nothing less than the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus decides to give the new believers some strong assurance in the matter of their belief: **"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."** Another sweeping statement by Jesus.

The apparent tolerance of other religions is, in reality, a mask for uncertainty. Indeed, it would certainly be improper for a human being on the earth to claim to know the absolute truth, unless he is himself quoting the author of absolute truth. The only One,

of course, who could claim to be the author of absolute truth would be God. But, as there are many who say that there is no God, there are many who, by the same logic, say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Both concepts belong together. They both belong to a realm of understanding that goes beyond the natural mind. Those who say that there is nothing beyond nature, automatically exclude themselves from the discussion. Those that accept the possibility of something beyond nature, also acknowledge that there is no way to actually prove the existence of the supernatural (as it is called) within the framework of natural laws. Thus, the knowledge of that which is beyond nature must depend upon the realm of revelation for its knowledge. If one denies that there is anything beyond nature, he automatically denies the revelational; and thus would have to deny the possibility of absolute truth. We must stop at this point and define

our terms. What do we mean by “truth,” and what do we mean by “absolute truth?”

The Greek word for truth is *aletheia*. In its basic meaning, it refers to reality. It distinguishes between that which is real and that which is illusory. Truth has to do with the communicating of reality. In other words, we could say that truth is the “articulation or verbalization of reality.” *When we use the word “absolute” with truth, we mean ultimate truth, or truth that is not subject to question or debate. In the natural or human frame of reference, it would, of course, be absurd to talk about such ultimate truth. But if one accepts the idea of the supernatural, and with it the idea of God, then the concept of absolute truth becomes quite valid. Whatever one knows of the supernatural, then, must, of necessity, come out of the supernatural; and, therefore, is not subject to the scientific method, or proof, that is relevant to the natural realm. On a number of occasions, Jesus used an expression translated in the King James Version by, “verily, verily.” This is actually a Hebraism (*'amén, 'amén*), which was used to indicate something that was certainly true, without debate. Thus, Jesus is saying, “I tell you the absolute truth.” Jesus never attempted to prove the existence of the absolute, any more than He attempted to prove the existence of God. As a matter of fact, for anyone to say that there is no absolute, they must themselves claim an absolute truth. Jesus, then, is here claiming something that no other religious leader, or philosopher, would dare to claim—that He has the absolute truth. In fact, later, in John 14, He claims to BE the truth. And where are His followers to acquire the truth? **“If you continue in My word, you shall know the truth.”**

But now, we must ask, what did Jesus mean by the expression, **“The truth shall make you free”**? Free from what? Free from sin. And in what sense, free from sin? Jesus further clarified this by drawing on the analogy of the slave versus the free man. In Jesus’ society, slavery was a very common thing, of course. The Bible frequently uses the analogy of slavery, without therefore condoning the practice. It must be here noted, by the way, that the Bible never encouraged the believers to get themselves involved in social action—that is, in trying to correct the ills of society in general. It was not that social ills were unimportant, but rather that the task of the church was to correct the cause of the illness and not the symptoms. If the church should become embroiled in handling the symptoms, it would have no time to get to the heart of the illness. By going for the cause of the illness, many social ills over the centuries have been, in fact, corrected automatically. A good example of this is the 18th century revival in England under John Wesley. John Wesley’s ministry was primarily toward the salvation of souls, but a great many social reforms followed immediately on the heels of the conversion of large numbers of people at that time. Almost every major social problem of the day was affected positively.

In using the analogy of slavery, Jesus is establishing, here, a general principle or condition of life rather than a specific succession of episodes. That is to say, in using this analogy with reference to sin, Jesus is pointing more to a general attitude and practice of sin rather than specific incidents of sin. **“He who makes a practice of sin”**—the Greek words here allow the idea of the continual process of sin rather than a specific act of sin. To paraphrase, Jesus is saying that if one is caught up in the continuing process of sin,

he is obviously the slave of sin. He then goes on to say that He, as a Son in the household, is a **“free man, and therefore has the power to free the slave in the household.”** He applies this to the bondage of sin, and offers to release the sinner from that bondage. “If the Son then shall make you free, you shall be really free.”

Now, to what extent can this freedom from sin be applied? Is Jesus saying that the normal condition of his followers is to be completely without offense? If that is what He is saying, the promise has almost, if not altogether completely failed. Who, of the people of God, throughout the centuries, would ever make such a claim. Obviously this is not what He is saying, because He Himself spoke often of the need of forgiving one another, and the need of being ready to confess our sins and to seek His own forgiveness. See, for example, Matthew 18:21. In John’s first epistle (chapters 1, 2) he deals very directly with the problem of how the believers should cope with the matter of sin.

But what then does Jesus mean? The clue is in the analogy that He uses of slavery. If one is a slave, he has no choice but to do exactly as the master bids him. But on occasion, he may be disobedient. This does not make him a free man. He is still a slave; although at that point, a disobedient slave. On the other hand, suppose that the slave

has been set free, and now he is a free man. As a free man, he may go back and voluntarily perform some function for his former master, but that does not mean that he has now resumed the position as a slave and lost his status as a free man. Just so, before one comes to Christ, he is the slave of Satan. He has no choice but to do the bidding of his master; although, in fact, he may on occasion, not exactly conform to those demands. Now comes Christ and frees this bond servant of Satan, and makes of him a free man. Unfortunately, it is possible that the free man may, in fact, find it possible to once again do something for his former master, but this does not then take away his status as a free man. Christ, then, has made us absolutely free as far as our position is concerned. But that does not mean that we would therefore never again commit an offense. Satan, our former master, may by clever deceit entice us into doing something for him, but he no longer has general control over our lives. Our destiny is no longer in his control, but in the control of Christ. Our freedom from the bondage of Satan then, does not depend upon our willpower, or our goodness, or our capacity to remain beyond the reach of Satan, but rather upon our secure position as free men, redeemed by Jesus Christ. If our freedom from Satan depended upon anything of ourselves, Jesus could not have made the sweeping statement about our being really free.

*See the author’s pamphlet, *Reality and Revelation*.

John 8:37-59

TRANSLATION

“I know that you are the seed of Abraham; but you seek to kill Me, because My word does not have a place in you. I am speaking the things which I have beheld from My Father; and you are doing the things which you have heard from your father.” They answered and said to Him, “Our father is Abraham.” Jesus said to them, “If you are the children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has spoken to you the truth which I have heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father.” They said to Him, “We have not been born of fornication; we have one Father, God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came out of God and have come [here]; for neither have I come from Myself, but that One sent Me. Why do you not know My speech? Because you are not able to hear My word. Ye are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you will to do. That one was a murderer from the beginning, and has not stood in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own things, because he is a liar and the father of it. And I, because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Who of you convicts Me concerning sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. I do not seek My glory; there is one who seeks and judges. I tell you the absolute truth, if anyone keep My word he shall never see death.” The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died and the prophets, and You say if one keep My word he shall not taste death forever. You are not greater are You than our Father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died; who do You make Yourself to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself My glory is nothing; it is the Father who glorifies Me, concerning whom you say, ‘He is our God’; and you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I said that I did not know Him, I would be a liar like you; but I know Him and I keep His word. Abraham, your father, was exultant to see My day and He

saw it and rejoiced.” The Jews then said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the absolute truth, before Abraham came into being, I am.” Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

COMMENTARY

The Conclusion of the Dialogue—The Eternal Son of God vs. the Dying Sons of Satan

As Jesus was talking to the Jews who had become the believers, a number of the unbelieving Jews joined the discussion, and once again Jesus’ authority was challenged. The Jews appealed to their pedigree. Abraham was their father. They were in bondage to no one; they needed no teacher—certainly not an upstart vagabond of questionable origin. And, as a matter of fact, if the name Abraham were not enough, they would go further. They were children of God. Jesus was completely unimpressed. “If you were the children of God, you would not be trying to kill me. If Abraham were here he would not kill me because he would know that I am speaking the truth. And it is absurd to bring God into the picture because if you were from God you would love Me, since it was God who sent Me here in first place. If you were from God, the Spirit of God would be able to witness to your hearts that I am true, and you would hear My words. The truth of the matter is that the devil is your father. He has been a murderer and a liar from the beginning, and you are following in his steps.” For this, of course, infuriated the Jews, and they accused Him of being demon-possessed.

Undaunted, Jesus pressed on with the boldness of One who knows He has the truth. “If you will follow My words you will live forever.” Fury turned to shock. “What are you talking about? Abraham is dead;

the prophets are dead. Who do You think You are?” “If I told you, you wouldn’t believe. I do not glorify Myself; it is the Father who glorifies Me. You do not know the Father, but I know Him, and I keep His word. If I told you any differently, I would be a liar like yourselves. You claim that Abraham is your father. God glorified Me to Abraham. He revealed to Abraham that someday I would come. Abraham saw My day, and was glad.” The Jews exploded with indignation, “You are not yet fifty years old and You have seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the absolute truth, before Abraham came into being, I Am.” In these very simple words, Jesus expresses one of the most profound and mystifying truths concerning the nature of His being.

The expression, “**I Am,**” has a very special meaning. The Greek phrase, *ego eimi*, is the equivalent of the name which God used to reveal Himself to Moses at the burning bush some fifteen hundred years previously. The narrative, is found in the third chapter of Exodus. In brief, God’s people had become slaves in Egypt. They had been in bondage about four hundred years. When the time came for their deliverance, God selected a man named Moses to carry out the task. Moses, a Jew, had been a member of Pharaoh’s household until an act of violence had caused him to flee into the wilderness, where he became a

shepherd for forty years. When God's time had come to deliver His people, He appeared to Moses in a burning bush out in the wilderness. Moses had seen a bush burning and yet not being consumed, and had turned aside to see it. It was at this point that God identified Himself to Moses and gave him the instructions for the deliverance of His people. Moses was concerned about being accepted by the people of God as their deliverer, and he asked God to tell him by what authority he should come to the people. He asked, "Whom shall I say has sent me?" God responded by telling him to say to the people that **"I Am hath sent me unto you."** The name which God gave there to Moses is the basis of the name used

throughout the Old Testament, *Yahweh*. For reasons which we shall not go into here, the name Yahweh had come over into English translation as Jehovah. As God revealed Himself to Moses by that name, it means the "eternally existent One."

Thus, Jesus, using that name, identified Himself with Yahweh, or Jehovah, who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, and by the same token, with the eternally existent Creator of the universe.

The unbelieving Jews, outraged at such blasphemy, picked up stones to kill Him on the spot, but Jesus slipped away and left the temple. His time had not yet come.

John 9:1-17

TRANSLATION

And as [Jesus] was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents; that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him. It is necessary for us to work the works of the One who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming, when no one is able to work. As long as I am in the world I am the Light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay out of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is being interpreted, 'Sent')." He went away then and washed, and came seeing. The neighbors then, and those who were beholding him formerly that he was a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who was sitting and begging?" Some were saying, "This is he," others were saying, "No, but he is like him." That one was saying, "I am he." They were saying then to him, "How did He open your eyes?" That one answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go and wash in Siloam'; I went then and washed and saw again." And they said to him, "Where is that One?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought him to the Pharisees; the one who had once been blind. And it was the Sabbath, the day on which Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then they and the Pharisees were asking him again how he recovered his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Then certain of the Pharisees were saying, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How is a man who is a sinner able to do such miracles?" And there was a division among them. They were saying then to the blind man again, "What do you say concerning Him, because He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."

COMMENTARY

The Light of the World Encounters Blindness

Jesus was constantly mingling with the miserable of the earth. He had, after all, been anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor and afflicted; to set the prisoners free; and to restore sightless eyes. (See Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18). To the masses of humanity the world is a wretched place. Sometimes the smug suburbanite cradled in American affluence tends to forget how very few on this earth enjoy such privilege. Unless the message of Jesus can make sense to these miserable masses, He can never be to them anything more than a symbol of privilege. When Jesus is smartly packaged and promoted around the world like a commodity, He becomes merely another trademark of American enterprise like Coca-Cola and Singer sewing machines.

As for Himself, Jesus went not grandly, but simply, to identify with the needy of the world. Having the power and authority to join the world at any social or economic level, God chose to manifest Himself by joining the ranks of the poor and the suffering. The prophet Isaiah captured this image when he wrote, **“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”** (Isaiah 53:3, 4).

Thus, by joining the ranks of the wretched, Jesus Himself provides the answer to the most penetrating question of all time: Why does part of the world suffer so miserably and another part prosper so grandly? By joining with the suffering, Jesus is saying, **“This is where reality lies. This is life at its deepest. The beautiful life is an illusion. Learn to cope with life at this level, and you will have mastered it.”**

Romans 8:17 is but one example of many texts throughout the Scripture that indicate that those who suffer on this earth will be glorified throughout eternity. Those who seek to avoid suffering on this earth may, in fact, miss its most important meaning. The Bible indicates that the world at this period of time is, in reality, largely dominated by Satan, and is therefore a hostile environment to those who are the followers of Christ.

Many have found a key to success and prosperity in this world, but usually that key involves becoming harmonious with this world's system, and therefore out of harmony with Christ. Jesus Himself said that we cannot serve two masters—we cannot serve God and this material world at the same time (Matthew 6:24). To serve God, then, puts us in a position of being out of step with the system of this world; and, therefore, subject to greater suffering as a consequence of its hostility. Satan is our enemy. He will do anything to prevent us from enjoying any benefits whatsoever from his world. Only by the supreme sovereignty of God, do His followers survive in this hostile environment. Peter expresses this principle of suffering very nicely in his letter to suffering Jewish believers who were dispersed throughout the world: **“For this is a gift of divine grace, if on account of conscience toward God one endure grief of suffering unjustly. For what sort of glory is it if, while sinning and being buffeted, you endure? But if while doing good and suffering you are patient, this is a gracious gift from God. For unto this purpose were ye called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving for you an example that you should follow in His steps”** (I Peter 2:19-21 A.T.).

Too much emphasis by the church on God's deliverance in terms of this world's adversities, is not in keeping with this text. When it is assumed that the blessing of God on one's life must include prosperity and health and the solution of earthly problems, it may rob the Christian of the blessing of suffering with Christ in the adversities of a world that is not friendly to Him. Let it be well remembered that after Christ's final coming, there will never again be an opportunity for us to know Him in the blessed realities of His comradeship in conflict and suffering. In fact, one of the tragedies of the so-called "deathbed conversion" is that such ones never have the opportunity of getting to know the Lord in the fellowship of His suffering.

The encounter with the blind man is yet another episode revealing Jesus' willingness to confront the reality of the world of evil. The Light of the world and the source of its life must admit that the world He, Himself, had made was now languishing in darkness and evil. He did not evade His responsibility, but plunged into the midst of its miseries and drank deeply the cup of its sorrows. He took its sin upon Himself and became the eternal sacrifice in the process of recovering it. That He will be able to effect its ultimate recovery He has no doubt, but now He must move among its afflicted, restoring deaf ears and sightless eyes. The physical recovery is symbolic of the spiritual, and one day there will be **"a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"** (II Peter 3:13). **"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor**

crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:1, 4). Meanwhile, those who would follow Christ, must continue for a time in a hostile world that responds to righteousness and truth with crucifixion.

But now, passing among the suffering, Jesus singles out a blind man. It is important to remember that Jesus did not heal all of the afflicted of Palestine. The miracles which He performed were signs for the purpose of proving His authority and power. In fact, the Greek word which is translated "miracle" means "sign." As in the discussion above, it was not Jesus' purpose in coming to the earth, to do away with all suffering; but rather to secure its spiritual redemption. The miracles which Jesus worked were intended as signs to the faithful Jewish remnant that He was indeed the Messiah. The apostles continued these miracles to prove that they too were anointed of God to declare the truth. Today, the Bible is our badge of authority. The power of God is primarily expressed through the use of His Word in affecting the hearts of men. The so-called "miracles" of today are not really so much signs, as they are the expression of divine grace to the world. God's way of dealing with His church is different. He does indeed heal and work miraculously among His children, but His major interest is in spiritual growth and maturity rather than in signs. He often elects not to heal, but when He makes this choice it is with a special purpose in mind that will work toward the benefit of the believer and the glory of God. If every believer who had faith ought to be healed immediately, then where were the testing that the Bible promises will come; and where the glory of God?

John 9:1-17 (continued)

When Jesus Passes By—Blind Eyes See Again

But now, back to the blind man. The disciples of Jesus, upon seeing the blind man, assumed that he was blind because of sin. That was, of course, the standard Jewish position. In their mind, it had to be either his own sin, or the sins of his parents. Jesus offered a new dimension in divine purpose. He said to His disciples that it was neither this man, nor his parents that had sinned, but in order that God might be glorified. Job, in the Old Testament, is the classic example of this concept. It is a strange thing that in the church today there is an ignoring of this concept. In some segments of the body of believers there seems to be the attitude that if one is not healed, he is either guilty of sin, or of unbelief. Let such thinking be forever put to rest by the narrative which we have before us; nor was faith an issue here. There is no indication whatsoever that this blind man had any personal faith at all. We must come to understand that God often works out His purposes in the lives of His people quite apart from their own inadequacies. A good example of this, of course, is the apostle Paul. Without any merit of his own, or even a search for Christ, he was suddenly encountered on the Damascus road and his life completely transformed; and, the history of the church is filled with incidents of the very same nature.

The disciples of Jesus were disturbed at the existence of such misery as this blind beggar, and they had to have a rational

explanation. It did not occur to them that God might have had anything to do with this. They resorted to their religious traditions and concluded that man, somehow, had to be at fault. In this they took the same position as the three friends of Job, whom Job classified as “miserable comforters.” In the Jewish traditions, sin and sickness were sisters. It would not do to blame God, and so a cause must be found that would lay the adversity at the feet of His erring subjects. Jesus, on the other hand, was not given to “nice” explanations or easy apologetics. He declared, without apology, that God had allowed this for His own particular purpose—to manifest His power. This man would become something of an object lesson, through which God would reveal Himself to the world. The disciples’ assumption that sin was the fundamental cause of the blindness, was clearly wrong. (Unfortunately, there are some in the church today who make the same false assumption—if one does not get healed, it is because of either sin, or unbelief, or unwillingness. It is a tragic error, and leaves many of the Lord’s children in needless despair.) God has many reasons for allowing His children to be afflicted—reasons that have nothing to do with sin or fault. Job is, of course, the classic example of God’s use of suffering for very noble purposes. A word here must be given to the children of God that are suffering affliction. It is best to concentrate on enduring the affliction and leave the reason to God. In His own time He will

make it known. If it is indeed the result of some offense either toward God or others, the Lord will make it known very clearly. If He does not give light in that respect, then one must just leave the matter in His hands and wait on Him. One must never assume that just because God does not deliver at the present time, there is some fault with one's self. Through his affliction the blind man became a link in the chain of events that was the salvation of the world. He thus joined with Jesus in the task of manifesting God to the world. The work of God in the world is urgent and requires stouthearted people who are willing to set aside the demand for "equal rights," and allow themselves to become whatever God needs for completing His task. What an honor—to become God's object lesson to the world!

The time has now come for deliverance. The sightless eyes will see again, not at the insistence of the blind man, nor yet because of his faith, but because God's time had come to reveal Himself in yet another way. Jesus made clay out of His own saliva and used it as a salve on the man's eyes. Saliva was, in fact, regarded in those days as a standard remedy for eye troubles. Jesus was not forcing the man to do something odd or distasteful as a test of faith, but rather was using a common approach to the problem in order to make it less of a problem for the man to believe. He was also drawing out the Pharisees. By using a standard healing technique, He was running counter to their law (not God's) which forbade the use of medical treatment on the Sabbath for anything but circumstances of dire emergency. The point was not lost on them.

He told the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. Again, this was a rather natural thing to request, and not a test of obedience. We must be careful about

pressing such a test with people who had no capacity apart from the power of the Holy Spirit to respond to such tests. The more that is required of people as a condition of God's help the less credit goes to God. This point we saw in the case of several others with whom Jesus dealt. The pool of Siloam had something of a sacramental significance, as we saw in the Feast of Tabernacles. This was probably important to the blind man. The salve and the washing were, of course, not necessary to the healing, but Jesus had His reasons for using them in this particular case. If this miracle has a spiritual significance, it is certainly probable that the waters of Siloam would represent the Holy Spirit and the eye salve would remind us of the words to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 in regard to their spiritual blindness—**"Anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see."** Jesus did not heal all the blind that were in the land of Palestine at that time. It was not His purpose to come and make life on this earth pleasant for people. It was His purpose to deliver them from this world so that they might have "treasures in heaven." It would have been inconsistent with His constant spiritual emphasis, had He focused on delivering people from earthly afflictions. Rather He promised that on this earth one would be constantly confronted with affliction. Later on in his gospel, John records the words of Jesus directly in the matter: **"I have spoken these things to you in order that in Me you might have peace; in the world you have affliction [pressure], but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** Human beings, whose minds are limited in their capacity to handle spiritual truths, must be taught by parables and symbols and object lessons. Thus, the blind man becomes an object lesson—a symbol of God's willingness and ability to deliver from sin and evil and

restore His creation to its rightful place of spiritual reality at His side forever.

John 9:18-41

TRANSLATION

The Jews did not believe then concerning him, that he was blind, and had recovered his sight, until they called the parents of him who had recovered his sight and asked them saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he see now?" His parents then answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know; ask him, he is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jews, because the Jews had already agreed together that if anyone should confess Him as Christ they would be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said that he is of age; ask him. Then the second time they called the man who was blind and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this Man is a sinner." That one then answered, "If He is a sinner I do not know; one thing I know, that I was blind and now I see." They said then to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I already told you and you did not hear; why do you wish to hear again? You do not also wish to become His disciples, do you?" And they reviled him and said, "You are the disciple of that One, but we are the disciples of Moses; we know that God has spoken to Moses, but this One, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "This is a marvelous thing that you do not know where He is from, and He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is reverent toward God and does His will, this one He hears. It has never been heard that one opened the eyes of one born blind; if this one were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." They answered and said to him, "You have been born altogether in your sins, and you teach us?" And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and He found him and said, "Do you believe on the Son of Man?" That one answered and said, "And who is He, Sir, that I may believe on Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and He who is speaking with you is that One." And he said, "I believe, Lord;" and he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, "I have come into this world for the sake of judgment, that they who do not see may see and they who see may become blind." And they of the Pharisees who were with Him heard

these things and said to Him, "We are not blind are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin; but now you say, 'We see;' your sin is remaining."

COMMENTARY

Of Blind Eyes That See and Seeing Eyes That Are Blind

There is no question but what Jesus' reason for performing this miracle and John's reason for recording it, was to symbolize the more important work of Christ in restoring spiritual sight and exposing spiritual blindness. This is clearly stated in verse 39, **"And Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment; that they who do not see may see and they who see may become blind.'"** The very contradictory nature of this statement helps to establish its authenticity. If one were trying to put words into Jesus' mouth, one would at least try to avoid making them contradictory. The same is true of the Old Testament. If one were trying to produce a God of love out of the imagination, one would certainly have avoided making such a bold point of God's involvement in sacrifices and bloody battles. Thus, the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies of the Bible, so constantly pointed to as evidence of its human origin, in fact, prove the opposite. The natural effort of the human writer would be to smooth out any contradictions and avoid inconsistencies. One is not likely to find inconsistencies in fairy tales. If Jesus is the Light of the world, then how can He talk about bringing about blindness in those who see? The plain teaching of Jesus was that no one could see the truth apart from the spirit of God. If one were humble enough to acknowledge his blindness and thus seek God's help, then he would see; but if one thought himself to be capable of the truth apart from God's help, then he would have no means of receiving the truth. The miracles of Jesus continually

brought out the attitudes of those who witnessed them. It was admittedly too much for the human mind, but the soul that was seeking God would be given the ability to receive the miracles. Those who saw the miracles through human eyes, would not be able to believe them.

Such was the test to which God put those who witnessed the miracle of the healing of the blind man. The man's neighbors, who knew him well, and those who had known him as a wretched beggar in the streets, were startled, and confused, and perplexed. They argued the matter vehemently; interrogated the blind man, and finally brought him to the Pharisees to settle the issue. This was, of course, like asking the devil to testify against himself. If they verified the work of Jesus they would condemn themselves. If they denied the miracle they would be branded as fools.

The Pharisees interrogated the blind man regarding the details of the incident. They were not seeking the truth, obviously, but were hoping to latch onto some bit of evidence with which they could discredit Jesus. Naturally, they found it. If they had not found it, they would have fabricated it. They charged Him with breaking the Sabbath laws, because He had healed on the Sabbath. But did Jesus, indeed, break a Law of God? Did He, in fact, at any point break the Law of God? The answer is, certainly not! Jesus plainly taught that if one broke one of the Laws, he was guilty of all. In this statement, He was showing that

all the world was guilty before God, and none could escape that judgment, apart from the Savior. But Jesus could not have included Himself in that guilt. He was sinless. What law then did He break? It was that cumbersome collection of oral and written traditions of the Pharisees. It was not God's Law, but the Pharisees interpretation and expansion of the law that Jesus often contradicted. Until the final sacrifice of Christ, the Law of Moses was in force, and all God's people were bound to keep it. However, the death of Christ brought in a New Covenant which replaced the Law of Moses as such. The replacing of the Law of Moses, however, did not mean the setting aside of all the Laws of God. The Law of Moses included many ceremonial and ritual laws that were specifically directed toward Israel. But it also included many basic principles of moral conduct that are an essential part of God's holy will for man. These laws, according to the New Covenant, are written on the heart of man rather than on tables of stone. These are matters of conscience, from which no one is excused. Thus the constant conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was not over a legalistic attitude towards the Mosaic Law, but rather a humanistic expansion of that law into details that God Himself had never set forth. The Pharisees were not interested in righteousness and truth; they were interested in destroying the credibility of Jesus, who threatened their religious system, and their place of power in the world. Thus, they cared not that a blind man had been delivered from his lifelong prison, but rather that their hypocrisy and falsehood had been exposed.

They interrogated the blind man. The penetrating power of the truth was on the side of the blind man; and the Pharisees, whose deceit and falsehood reaped a harvest of frustration, turned in rage upon

the man's parents. The parents were threatened with being expelled from the synagogue—a more serious penalty to the Jew, than the loss of the rights and privileges of citizenship. They shrank back in fear, and put the weight of responsibility on their son to speak for himself. And speak for himself he did. With biting sarcasm, he exposed their duplicity, and reminded them that they did not even want to know the truth and would not become His disciples if they did know the truth. This simple blind man could only marvel at the ignorance and hardness of these religious leaders. His mind set free by the Spirit of Christ, he cut to ribbons the defenses of the Pharisees with the sword of truth. Thrown out of the synagogue by the Pharisees, he received his medal of honor—forever marked as an enemy of Satan.

Sight restored, the man once blind now saw too clearly to ever again be in harmony with the systems of religion. Hearing that he had been cast out, Jesus lost no time in welcoming him to the new fraternity—the fellowship of the forsaken—that is the forsaken of the world. The Psalter says, **“When my father and my mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up”** (Psalm 27:10). There is no going back. Once the commitment is made, all who are not the friends of Christ become the enemy, and our habitat the hostile world. Jesus made it quite clear to the disciples that unless they were willing to leave every human relationship and follow Him, they could not be His disciples. But what a glorious climax to this remarkable episode! Jesus sought him and took him in. 'Tis easily worth the giving up of all. It is not worth the giving up of all merely to be identified with a new religious group; or philosophy of life, or a system of religion. The will is no match for an adequate motive; and the only adequate motive is Christ. Delivered of his blindness, he

received the Light of life. Bereft of earthly ties, he would walk forever in the fellowship

of Christ.

John 10:1-21

TRANSLATION

“I tell you the absolute truth, he who does not enter the sheepfold through the door, but ascends from another place, that one is a thief and a robber; but he who enters through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To this one the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he puts forth all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice; and a stranger they will not follow at all, but they will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus spoke this allegory to them; and those people did not know what He was saying to them. Jesus said to them again, “I tell you the absolute truth that I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if one enter in through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and shall find pasture. The thief does not come except that he may steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep; the hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholds the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees,—and the wolf seizes them and scatters them—because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I am laying down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, it is necessary for Me to lead those also and they shall hear My voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me: because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me but I lay it down from Myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again; this commandment I have received from My Father.” Again there was a division among the Jews on account of these words. Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is mad; why do you hear him?” Others were saying, “These words are not the words of a demon-possessed person; a demon is not able to open blind eyes, is he?”

COMMENTARY

The True Shepherd vs. Wolves and the Thieves and Hirelings

Endlessly the dialogue continues between Jesus and the self-styled religious leaders of Israel. It had all really started at the feast, and the Pharisees were determined once and for all to discredit and dispose of this infuriating intruder into what they regarded as their exclusive domain. The people of God, who were prisoners of these pitiless imposters, had not been capable of throwing off the yoke. They were, after all, sheep. How could they challenge the shepherd? In fact, Jesus did not regard the Pharisees as shepherds at all, but hirelings. In His mind God's sheep were without a shepherd. Looking out over the crowd one day, His heart was filled with compassion for them, **“Because they were flayed and fallen with exhaustion as sheep not having a shepherd”** (Matthew 9:36 A.T.).

At last the true shepherd has come. The sheep will have their champion. But the Pharisees, of course, do not give up their place easily. The shepherd is in a death-struggle with the wolf. Soon the Pharisees will succeed in crucifying their enemy, but in their victory, they will suffer the greatest defeat in history. In that act of infamy against the Son of God, they will have sealed their doom, along with their master—Satan. Remember that Jesus did not regard these Pharisees merely as misguided religious leaders but rather as agents of Satan.

Jesus now reveals His shepherd role, and dispossesses the hirelings. Jesus is not here engaging in a pleasant discourse about grazing sheep and tender shepherd. He is engaged in a life and death struggle with the wolves. Indeed, these are more than wolves. They are treacherous beasts masquerading as shepherds, and it is Jesus' task to expose them. He is confronting blind and faithless leaders—the Pharisees—who

had expelled the blind man from the synagogue, because in the recovery of his sight he had seen too much. Their hardness and hypocrisy exposed in the way they treated this blind man, Jesus further rips off their veneer and shows them to be, not the shepherds of Israel as they falsely portrayed themselves, but thieves and robbers. The thief deprives his victim by stealth; the robber ravages by violence. The Pharisees qualified in both categories. These Pharisees were not part of the Levitical priesthood which God had ordained through Moses; rather they were usurpers of religious authority who had risen to power during the time of the Maccabees (in the second century B.C.). They were the self-styled custodians of the “traditions of the elders.” (For a further discussion of this subject see the Commentary on John 3.) It is in this context of conflict that Jesus developed the shepherd theme of John 10.

Jesus Christ is the True King; and the True Priest; and the True Shepherd. As King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He guarantees ultimate victory over the forces of evil and the total control of the universe. As the great High Priest, He guarantees our reconciliation to God and our eternal identity with Him. As the “Great Shepherd of the sheep,” He provides the daily protection, guidance, and care that we need in our sojourn upon the earth. There is no facet of our welfare that God has not provided for. The wolves may howl outside the fold; the storms may batter the walls; the robbers may make their assault; but the sheep that stay within the shelter of the sheepfold are forever secure in the ceaseless care of the Shepherd. What an unspeakable gift! Jesus Christ as our Shepherd for all time, and our Sovereign for all eternity!

But what are the truths that Jesus is teaching with this illuminating allegory? First of all He sounds a warning about false shepherds. Jesus warns against them; Peter warns against them; Paul warns against them. But how can the sheep know? The answer—by the voice. Jesus said, **“And he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice; but they will not follow a stranger at all but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”** The sheep cannot always be expected to discern between false and true shepherds by reason or knowledge alone. There must also be a keen sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In the spiritual application, God has His true shepherds over the flock. But these shepherds really are only vessels speaking the Word of Christ to His followers. If the believer is really listening for the voice of Christ, he should hear it in the word of those whom Christ has anointed as His teachers and His shepherds. For the believer to be able to make an intellectual judgment about the truth or accuracy of the teacher, it would require many years of technical training. For most people this is not a possibility. It is therefore necessary for the believer to rely very heavily upon the Holy Spirit for strong guidance in the matter. Paul indicates in Romans 8 that when the Holy Spirit witnesses to us who are believers, our spirits will respond to Him. When the Holy Spirit is speaking through His anointed vessels, it should be obvious to the one who is listening for the Master’s voice.

Along with the witness of the Spirit, there are certain tests for truth that the believer

can apply. It is of course very important for one to have a knowledge of the Word of God. The more knowledgeable one is in the Word, the less likely to be misled. It is obvious that all teaching must be tested by the Bible, to the extent that one has the capacity to do so. The witness of the Holy Spirit and conformity to the express Word of God are the two fundamental principles upon which one should test the truth. In addition to these, the following guidelines will be helpful in evaluating the true shepherd:

1. The true shepherd will make the glorifying of Jesus Christ as God who came in the flesh, the central theme of his message and life;
2. He will feed the flock with the Word of God, and not just with human ideas about the Word of God;
3. He will rely heavily upon the Holy Spirit for guidance both of himself and the flock;
4. An attitude of love and concern for the flock will be manifest to all;
5. His life will be consistent with his message;
6. He will minister comfort and strength to the sheep rather than harshness and discouragement;
7. He will lead them as sheep, and not drive them as cattle;
8. The voice of the great Shepherd will come through, so that the sheep will be given naturally to follow Him;
9. There will be no trace of the hireling; that is money and personal welfare will not be of primary concern;
10. There will be a heart for prayer—to uphold the flock ceaselessly before God.

John 10:1-21 (continued)

The True Shepherd—Dying for the Sheep; Living for the Sheep; Caring for the Sheep

Having warned against false shepherds, Jesus goes on to reveal the nature of His own role as Shepherd. He first declares His ultimate purpose—to give abundant life. He came not to place His people under authoritarian bondage, but to give them the everlasting life which God had purposed for them from the beginning of creation. In the very nature of the analogy which Jesus uses here, it is implied that God did not bring mankind into the world to be beasts of burden like horses or oxen or mules. In another figure of speech, God does send forth His people as warriors and harvesters, but in general, our calling is not so much to be His workers, as to be His family. To assume that our central calling is to be workers, would be like assuming that the reason that people bear children is to have a staff of servants. The idea that we as God's children must be busy every moment for the Master has been responsible for much dissatisfaction and discouragement among believers. If one believes that his central purpose in salvation is for service, then he is likely never to be satisfied that he has done enough.

Given the conditions in the world today one is likely to assume that no matter how much he does it is inadequate, and thus to be discouraged. The religious flesh is no more satisfied than the worldly flesh. The self is the hardest taskmaster of all. No matter how much one has, the self demands more. The same is true with fleshly religion.

No matter how much sacrifice one makes or how much one does, the self demands more. It is best for the believers to see themselves as primarily members of the family of God, or “sheep of His pasture,” whose primary meaning in life is the relationship to Christ. When God has an assignment for us, He will let us know. A ceaseless round of activities is no more wholesome in relating to God's family than it is in relating to a human family.

The sheep quietly graze in the pasture, under the watchful care and provision of the shepherd, and produce the wool that is the natural product of their daily growth. It is not that they are unproductive; it is that their product is the natural fruit of the inner life that they have from God. Jesus says much about fruit bearing, to use another figure. The meaning of fruit-bearing, as far as the believer is concerned, is clearly set forth in Galatians 5:22: **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, graciousness, goodness, faith, meekness [openness to God], self control; with reference to such things there is no law”** (A.T.). Fruit-bearing in regard to the believer does not mean winning souls, but rather producing the fruit of Godliness by reason of the life of God within us. The main purpose of the peach tree for example, is not to produce other peach trees, but rather to produce peaches. There is a seed within the peach which will produce another fruit tree as a

by-product. Thus, productivity in the believer is a natural process of the expression of the life of the Spirit within. As with the tree so with the sheep. As the sheep are nourished by the shepherd they produce the wool. He does not make of them beasts of burden.

In the second place, Jesus reveals His role as the true shepherd in laying down His life for the sheep. **“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...”** Technically, the phrase should be translated, “is laying down his life for the sheep.” The tense of the Greek verb here implies not a simple, single act, as in the moment of crucifixion; but rather, a continuous process, as in the sacrificing of His life on a daily basis while He moved among God’s creatures on the earth. There was more to the death of Christ than the event on Golgotha. He told His disciples to take up their cross daily. Jesus pressed the point continually that to be the friend of God was to be the enemy of the world; and to be the friend of the world was to be the enemy of God. The smoldering hatred of the world for Jesus manifested itself in a hundred ways while He walked the earth, and burst into flame on the mount of crucifixion. Had God permitted it, the Pharisees would have put Christ to the cross far earlier. As it was they had to content themselves with heaping upon Him all the vehemence that their treacherous hearts could evoke. The very God of the universe voluntarily submitted to this contempt for the sake of the redemption of the world. Paul knew the meaning of this when he said to the Galatians, **“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world.”** (Galatians 6:14 A.T.). And again, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ**

lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and delivered up Himself on my behalf” (Galatians 2:20 A.T.). So the death of the Shepherd was not a single event of crucifixion, but a long series of daily dying for the sake of the sheep. **“For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45 A.T.). But the followers of the Shepherd must also die daily with Him.

The death of Jesus was the fulfillment of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. No longer would a sacrifice be required for sin. But there is a sense in which Jesus could not die every man’s death. There is a dying that each must experience for himself. This kind of dying means a loosening of all earthly ties. It means the setting aside of all earthly ambitions and goals. It means giving up the right to earthly treasures in favor of those of the heavenly kingdom. In short, it means that all the interests, desires and aspirations of the natural man must be subservient to the claims of the Spirit. The accomplishing of this death of the natural man is a process presided over by the Spirit of Christ within us. It is not done in a moment of presumptuous consecration or commitment. It takes a lifetime of interaction with the Spirit of God in our spirits. Of Jesus it was said that, **“Even though being a son, He learned submission from the things which He suffered”** (Hebrews 5:8 A.T.). This was that part of the dying which Jesus could not do for us. Each must die his own death in the flesh. Thus, God Himself, through Jesus, tasted death for every man. He knew what it meant for man to die, not just in the agonies of the crucifixion, but in the daily dying of the natural man, living in a world that is hostile toward God.

Voluntarily Jesus laid down His life and took it back again. He was in total control of the forces of life and death in the universe. At no time during His life on earth was Jesus dominated by the will of man or of Satan. On many occasions when the Jews would have killed Jesus, He slipped away from them easily. At any moment He could have called upon thousands of the hosts of heaven had He wished to do so. The life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus were in every respect a gift of God to man. As King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ has the ultimate control of all the universe. Surely the sheep are secure with such a Shepherd. The third great truth that Jesus is expressing is the highly personal nature of His interaction with the sheep. **“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.”** The great consolation for the believer in a world of suffering and affliction, is the ceaseless comradeship of Christ. If He allows us to suffer, He surely suffers with us. The magnificent promise in John 14 is, **“I will not leave you comfortless [orphans], I will come to you.”** In John 16:33, He says, **“I have spoken these things unto you that in**

Me you might have peace; in the world you will have affliction, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world” (A.T.). From the moment we take Christ into our hearts, He becomes the citadel—the fortress—in which the spirit rests secure. Beloved Christian, battered and besieged, does the battle seem too much for you? Does the enemy seem invincible? Are you fainting and weary? Be of good cheer. If you have taken Christ into the fortress of your spirit it will never fall. Turn your eyes on the Captain of your salvation and not upon the fierceness of the foe.

The grand assurances of this shepherd allegory were uttered to God’s people, the Jews. However, Jesus makes it plain that the Gentiles will not be excluded from His limitless grace. **“I have other sheep which are not of this fold; these also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** As always there was a division among the hearers. Some believed and followed Him; some branded Him a fool and remained in their blindness. The power of life and death is in the hand of the Creator but the power of choice belongs to the creature.

John 10:22-42

TRANSLATION

Then there came the feast of dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch. The Jews then surrounded Him and were saying to Him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us boldly."

Jesus answered them, "I told you and you did not believe; the works which I am doing in the name of My Father, these bear witness concerning Me; but you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me, and I give to them eternal life, and they do not ever perish, and no one shall ever snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Again, the Jews picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I have showed you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone Me?"

The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You but for blasphemy, and because You being a man make Yourself God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' If he said those to be gods to whom the Word of God came (and the Scripture is not able to be broken); He whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, do you say 'You blaspheme,' because I said I am the Son of God? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, do not even believe Me, believe the works; in order that you may come to know and continue to know that the Father is in Me and I in the Father." They were seeking again to seize Him; and He went out from their hand.

And He went away again across the Jordan unto the place where John was first baptizing; and He remained there. And many came to Him and were saying, John did

not do any sign, but all things whatsoever John said concerning this man were true and many believed on Him there.

COMMENTARY

More Dialogue—Patiently, the Shepherd Reaches Out, yet Again to the Lost Sheep of Israel

At the conclusion of the Jewish year was the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, as it is called today. A century and a half before Jesus was born (168 B.C.), Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, had run pigs through the holy temple of God at Jerusalem. Four years later, the Maccabees routed the Syrians and restored the temple worship. Signaled by the rekindling of the flame, which burned for eight days, the event has been celebrated to this day as the Feast of Hanukkah, or “Lights.”

As always, Jesus was there, sharing the life of His people. Yet once more He would reach out to the lost sheep of Israel. Walking in the temple, in Solomon’s porch, the Light of the world was in sharp contrast to the flickering flame of the altar. And, as always, blind eyes would not see that Light. Blinded by centuries of disobedience, they kept calling for the Light, even as the “Sun of Righteousness” had risen to flood the eastern skies. “Don’t keep us in suspense; tell us plainly if You are the Christ.” Jesus knew they were trifling with Him, “I already told you and you did not believe. Look at the miracles I have done. If you really wanted to know, they would be enough to bear witness concerning Me. They are not enough for you because you do not want to believe. And you do not want to believe, because you are not of God’s sheep. If you were God’s sheep, you would hear the voice of His shepherd.”

Jesus then offers eternal life from the Father. And in a startling declaration, He identifies Himself with God, “I and the Father are one.” The furious Jews picked up stones and would have slain Him on the spot. Jesus demanded an explanation. The law, of course, would not let them kill without cause. They paused for a moment, in their murderous intent, not because they had changed their minds, but because they needed to justify their deed. “Are you murdering Me for My miracles?” Jesus wanted the record clear. “No,” said the Jews, “not for miracles, but for blasphemy. You called Yourself God.” Jesus would not let them off the hook with a nebulous charge. “But,” said Jesus, “Do not your own scriptures say that all are gods to whom the Word of God has come? (Psalm 82). Why then do you charge Me with blasphemy for making the same claim when, as a matter of fact, I am the One whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world?” Jesus wanted no uncertainty as to the claim that He was making. He wanted it quite clear that the Jews knew what His claims were, rejected them, and sought to slay Him. Jesus kept pressing. “The deeds that I perform are My witness. If I did not do the works of God, then you would have no grounds to believe Me; but, since I am doing the works of God, believe the miracles, if you do not believe Me. There is no need for ignorance. The deeds that I do show that the Father is in Me.” Jesus had backed them into a corner. They either had to accept Jesus as the Messiah, or deny that

God could ever reveal the Messiah to them through these signs. The problem was not proof, but prejudice. The Old Testament prophets had correctly predicted the miracles by which the Messiah would be revealed, and they had correctly predicted the blindness which would prevent them from accepting the Messiah in spite of any signs that accompanied Him.

The miracles, or “signs” which Jesus did, were never intended to be a proof for the

existence of God. But to the Jews, who already believed in God, the miracles, served to show that the God of their fathers had placed His seal of approval upon Jesus as His true Messiah. Large numbers of Jews, looking rather for an earthly kingdom than the spiritual deliverance of salvation, stubbornly resisted Jesus; but to those who were open to God, the Holy Spirit bore witness concerning Jesus, and there beside the Jordan where His earthly ministry had begun, many believed on Him.

John 11:1-16

TRANSLATION

And there was a certain sick man, Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and Martha her sister. Now it was the Mary who had anointed the Lord with myrrh and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. The sisters then sent to Him saying, "Lord, behold he whom you love is sick." And when Jesus had heard He said, "This sickness is not to death, but for the sake of the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. When He heard therefore that he was sick, He then remained in the place where He was two days. Then after this He said to His disciples, "Let us go unto Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews are seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If one walk in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world; but if one walk in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him." He said these things, and after this He said to them, "Lazarus our friend has fallen asleep, but I am going to awake him." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep he shall be delivered." Now Jesus had spoken concerning his death; but they thought that He was speaking concerning the sleep of resting. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and I rejoiced that I was not there for your sakes, in order that you may believe; but let us go to him." Thomas who is called Didymus, said then to his fellow disciples, "Let us go that we also may die with him."

COMMENTARY

Jesus—Tested As We Are—Experiences Personal Human Tragedy

Apparently, Jesus had some close personal friends. The family at Bethany seemed to be somewhat special to Him. But was not everyone who believed on Him His friend? Yes, in a certain sense that is true. In fact, He Himself said at one point, **"I have called you friends."** But, in saying this, He was expressing Himself in His official

position as the revelation of the truth and love of God. No doubt, in His glorified state, Jesus Christ, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, will not have any private personal relationships. Yet, of course, all who name the name of Christ; and, (having done His will), reign with Him forever, will be very much one with Him. In a sense deeper than

Israel will probably know, the church, which is the Bride of Christ, will have something of a special relationship to Him. But now, on the earth, Jesus must taste the natural human experiences that will enable Him to be the faithful and sensitive high priest of Hebrews 4:15—**“For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, having been tested in every way like us, apart from sin. Let us then come with boldness to the throne of grace, in order that we may obtain mercy and find grace for a timely help”** (A.T.). Had Jesus not gone through the experiences of close personal ties, He could hardly have known what it was like to be human. It is in the area of interaction with others on the personal level, that we experience our deepest joys and sorrows.

There was, of course, nothing unwholesome about Jesus’ relationship to this little family at Bethany, but there was something very human. The text makes a special point of this. In the few verses quoted above we have reference to Mary’s highly personal ministry to Jesus in the anointing of His feet and wiping them with her hair; the special reference to Jesus’ close friendship with Lazarus, and the emphasis on the fact that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Even the disciples felt the impact of this, because some of them wanted to go and die with Lazarus when they heard that he was dead. It must be clearly understood, however, that this kind of relationship was, in fact, a part of Jesus’ earthly experience, and must not be extended into His present glorification.

Christian people are still trying to extract from their relationship to Christ some of the fleshly elements that would have been true primarily of His earthly role of Jesus. Christ indeed loves us, but He is not our

“lover;” He is our Father, but never our “daddy;” He is our friend, but not our “buddy.” The Spirit of Christ within us satisfies every spiritual need, but does not necessarily satisfy every human desire. The woman, for instance, who has lost her husband, will be lonely in a human sense, in the loss of her companion. And, no matter how deeply she is related to Christ’s Spirit, there are still the long, lonely nights. The power of the Spirit of Christ within her will give her the strength to cope with the loneliness, but she must not try to make Jesus a surrogate, or substitute husband. One is not here trying to rob the widow of her comfort, but rather to keep her from being disappointed. While some may get away with the “fantasizing” of Jesus as a husband, others will not find this to be a possibility and will assume that they are simply not “spiritual” enough to be able to bring about this kind of relationship.

Loneliness is something much like the flu. It is unpleasant but, usually, is not fatal and one may just have to ride it out. In other words, the answer to loneliness is not to find some kind of fleshly type of relationship to Jesus, but rather to be strengthened by the Spirit of Christ within to handle the loneliness. Incidentally, it should also be said that satisfying loneliness by careless methods, such as wrong companions, is also not a good solution. There are other things worse than loneliness; among them, the destructive experiences that come from satisfying loneliness in the wrong ways. Sometimes the fear of loneliness is worse than the loneliness itself. There are, after all, a number of advantages to being alone. Jesus, having been involved in human relationships could understand the meaning of things like loneliness; and is able, by His Spirit to minister to us in these matters. But, the fact that He understands,

does not mean that He is going to eliminate all sorrow and loneliness and human distress from our lives. Much of this is needed for our earthly testing. We must be careful not to insist upon the indulging of the flesh in our relationship to Christ. Paul speaks very plainly of this in II Corinthians 5, where he says that now he no longer knows anyone after the flesh, not even Christ. Paul often uses the expression, "flesh" to refer to the natural man. It is not necessarily something that is wrong, but something that pertains basically to this life on the earth. *(See footnote).

In a final comment on this entire theme, it is well to realize that while Jesus thoroughly understands and accepts our own human relationships to one another, and our human needs and desires, that does not mean that He responds to us at the level of the flesh. The whole meaning of Pentecost lies in the new relationship between God and His people which can now flow in the spirit and set aside the encumbrances of the natural man which so limited the relationship of Israel to God. The whole of the Old Testament Law was based on the fleshly requirement of sacrifices and the tabernacle and temple with its furnishings. The whole book of Hebrews goes into this matter of the replacing of the earthly and fleshly worship symbols with the new worship in the spirit. In Romans 7 and 8, and in Philippians 3, Paul goes into the total inadequacy of the flesh as a dependable basis for relationship to Christ, and shows instead that we must live with Christ rather in the spirit. In practical terms, this means that our spirit is a fortress of faith within which the Spirit of Christ reigns continually, while the flesh is the battleground of conflict between earthly desires and heavenly purposes.

Our human emotions are not a dependable gauge of our relationship to Christ, or of His dealings with us. To attempt to tie our relationship to Christ to the manifestations of human emotion is to put our spiritual life on a rollercoaster. We must rather understand that in all the ups and downs of human experience, Christ still reigns effectually within our spirits and His Spirit is doing His work within us in the midst of the fierce battle that rages in our flesh. When we can come to the end of the day, and still care to relate to Christ and to talk with Him, then we can be sure that we have been victorious over the enemy. Peace and love and joy, patience and all of these spiritual qualities are a fruit of the spirit and not a feeling within the flesh. Christ does, of course, care about, and see to our human needs but He does not indulge our human desires.

These comments have been made, not in the effort to take away comfort from us in our human pilgrimage, but rather to prevent the kind of disappointment that comes when people expect something more of Christ in the way of personal feelings and manifestations, than He actually cares to give. After all, He came to deliver us from the flesh and not to indulge it. He came to perfect our capacity to relate to Him in the spirit and not to perfect our ability to bring spiritual experience into fleshly expression. Thus, for example, He prefers to communicate with His people at the spirit level rather than in the audible and visual terms that were necessary with the Old Testament prophets. If we demand too much in the way of external manifestations, we may be hindering our development in relating to Christ in the spirit. Jesus chided the Jews for "seeking after signs," an exercise of the flesh, but many Christians today are in danger of following the same pattern. As Jesus said to the doubting

Thomas in the upper room, **“Because you have seen Me, have you believed?”**

Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed” (John 20:29 A.T.).

*The discussion of the issue of human relationships is extremely important in this particular passage. We conclude the following: (1) That Jesus did indeed have certain personal friendships during His life on the earth; (2) That there was nothing out of order about these relationships, and certainly nothing that was unwholesome; (3) The experiencing of these personal relationships was most important to round out the total involvement of Jesus as a human being in order that He may be able to function with understanding as our High Priest; (4) That these human relationship must not be extended into His present glorified state where His dealings with His people are at the spirit level; (5) The effort to relate to Christ “after the flesh,” can result in much disappointment; and (6) On the earth we must still express our spiritual relationships in human or natural ways. But these relationships must be rooted in the spirit.

John 11:17-37

TRANSLATION

When Jesus then had come, He found him having been in the tomb already four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs away [a little under two miles]. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. Martha, then, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary was sitting In the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died; and now I know that whatever You ask God He will give it to You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes on Me even if he dies, shall live, and everyone who lives and believes on Me shall not die forever, do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have come to believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

And when she had said this she went away and called Mary her sister quietly, and said, "The Master is here and calling you." And when that one heard, she rose quickly and was going to Him; and Jesus had not yet come into the village but was yet in the place where Martha had gone to meet Him. The Jews then who were with her in the house and were consoling her, seeing Mary that she rose quickly and went out, followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Mary then when she had come where Jesus was and beheld Him, fell at His feet, and said to Him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus then when He saw her weeping and those Jews weeping who had come with her, was turbulent in His Spirit and was Himself troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. The Jews then were saying, "Behold how He loved him." But certain of them said, "Was not this one who opened the eyes of the blind able to have made it that this one would not have died?"

COMMENTARY

Jesus Brings to Human Tragedy the Power of Resurrection Life

Jesus, having entered the stream of human life at the lower levels of society, rather than at the levels of royalty and privilege, was not insulated from the miseries and tragedies, of the suffering masses. Nor did He elect to remain aloof from the personal interactions that would expose Him to the emotional stresses of human relationships. He would know the rigors of the earthly vale, where bliss at best is a sometime thing, and disappointment the prevailing reality of the human condition. It is understandable that this be so, inasmuch as the earth at present is under the considerable influence of Satan, who cares not to allow the people of earth any peace.

In a mood consumed with vengeance toward God and all His works, as a result of God's decree against Him after the Fall, Satan conspires in every possible way to prevent the people of earth from enjoying any benefits whatsoever from God's creation. Were it not for God's supreme power, Satan would succeed in devastating all that is on the earth. The evils that exist in the world today, so commonly blamed on God, are in reality the effort of Satan to accomplish his evil design against the world. In this effort, he seems able not only to stir up the forces of nature, but also to stir up and poison the minds of people against each other. The question that should really be asked is not why there are such terrible evils on the earth, but why these evils have not by now consumed the earth. God, in His mercy, does preserve not only His own people, but with them the majority of the earth. According to II Thessalonians 2:6-10, when the church has been removed from the earth, and with it the prevailing Spirit of God that preserves the earth, then there will be a period of great destruction, followed by the final banishment of Satan and the complete renewal of the earth

totally without evil. (See Revelation 20 and 21).

But now, Jesus shares the miseries of this earth with the people. He is learning the meaning of suffering firsthand. He does not move in divine insulation. He knows what we know, and feels what we feel. He had enjoyed the earthly comfort of that little family in Bethany. He had shared their hospitality and been refreshed in their loving care. Now He must share also their sorrows. That is the way of human relationships; joy and sorrow mingle in the depths of caring.

It must be re-emphasized that Jesus' experience with human relationships was essential in His identification with mankind. **“For clearly He did not take upon Him that which is of angels, but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham. In which regard it was fitting that He should be in all respects like His brethren; in order that He may become the merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God, unto the end that He might be the atonement for the sins of the people; for in that He Himself suffered, having been tested, He is able to help those who are being tested”** (Hebrews 2:16-18 A.T.). Had Jesus merely moved through the human scene as an observer with divine immunity from emotional feelings, then He would not have been able to understand and share with us our testings on the earth. Now, however, in Glory, with His earthly experience behind Him, Jesus Christ functions at the spirit level. He neither is indifferent to our earthly sufferings, having suffered Himself, nor does He, on the other hand, relate to us in the flesh. (See the previous section for further discussion of this theme).

When Jesus received word of the sickness of Lazarus, He knew that Lazarus would die; but He also knew that He would be able to raise him from the dead. The suffering which Jesus experienced in this matter, and which brought about deep grief within Him to the point of tears, had to do rather with what it was that His friends would have to suffer for His sake. Mary and Martha had to go through the bitter agony of the brother's death, without any knowledge that they would see him again on this earth.

This, of course, was grief enough; but added to it was the agonizing wait for help that did not come. Their friend had let them down. The anguish was heightened by the assurance that had He come He could have saved their brother. Jesus knew the depth of their grief, and suffered with them in it. For Jesus, the anguish was even greater, because He knew that He had to disappoint His friends for reasons that they would not immediately understand. There was more to the dying of Jesus than the episode on the cross. There was the daily anguish of walking in the midst of a world that would not understand Him; and would not believe Him, and would not receive Him, though He held for them the key to life.

Neither Mary nor Martha could restrain the outburst of anguish and disappointment

that Jesus had not come to them. However, Martha still clung to her belief, carried by an inner, God-given spirit of faith that was quite beyond the realities of the tragic hour. Mary prostrated herself at Jesus' feet and sobbed out the anguish of a broken heart and a shattered world. Jesus wept.

Were this the end of the story, we would but add another tragic drama to the interminable string of tragedies that have marched across the stage of time from the beginning of man's life on the earth to the present hour. But the story does not end, here. If Jesus was tardy to Mary and Martha, He was not a moment off schedule as far as the grand purposes of God were concerned. Jesus would turn sorrow into joy with the touch of resurrection life. Not only would Mary and Martha see the glory of God, but out of the ashes of their sorrow would arise a symbol of hope for the entire world. If we would view life realistically, we must conclude that we are caught in a world of sorrow and illusion; of disappointment and devastation. God does not promise that any will escape its withering touch. But, to all who will receive Him, He promises to bring life out of death. **"I am the Resurrection and the Life; He who believes on Me, even if he dies he shall live, and everyone who lives and believes on Me shall not die, forever"** (A.T.).

John 11:38-44

TRANSLATION

Jesus then being again deeply stirred up in Himself came to the tomb. Now it was a cave and there was a stone laid against it. And Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the one who had died said to Him, "Lord, he already smells, for it is the fourth day." Jesus said to her, "Did not I say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? Take away the stone then." And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You are hearing Me at all times; but for the sake of the crowd which is standing around I said it, in order that they might believe that You have sent Me." And when He had said these things He cried with a great voice, "Lazarus, come out." He who had died came out bound foot and hand with bindings, and his face bound up with a napkin. Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go."

COMMENTARY

At the Tomb of Lazarus—The Confrontation with Death

Jesus approached the tomb of His beloved friend, immersed in a sea of misery and grief. Around Him everywhere were the symbols of a world struggling in the clutches of the evil one. The death-shadows encompassing the burial cave; the sobs of the grieving sisters; and the lamentations of the traditional mourners mingled to evoke the scene of sorrow that would touch with turbulence even the heart of the Son of God. That Jesus was not immune from such stirrings within Himself is clearly indicated by two very descriptive words that are used of Him in revealing His innermost reactions to the scene that was before Him. The Greek word, *embrimaomai*, translated by the milder term, "stirred up," is from an old classical Greek word that has to do with the

snorting of horses. It does not really so much indicate anger as is commonly thought, but rather the intensity and turbulence of the battlefield—snorting horse and panting rider caught up in the chaos of the conflict. The word is used of Jesus on two other occasions in the Gospels (Matthew 9:30 and Mark 1:43), where Jesus is strongly urging those who have been healed, not to tell anyone else. Anger here seems an inappropriate reaction to people who are merely victims of a satanic world. It is quite possible, however, that Jesus was here again stirred deeply within Himself over the wretched condition of mankind, brought about by His arch enemy, Satan. The word is used twice here in the narrative of Lazarus. The episode is

charged with the intensity of the conflict between Christ and Satan—between life and death.

The word used with this one [*embrimaomai*] to further describe Jesus' inner feelings is the word *tarasso*, which means "deep distress, perplexity, agitation or turbulence." Confronting the agony of suffering humanity, Jesus did not of course share its hopelessness or despair, but neither could He escape the intensity of its pain, if He were to be truly the great High Priest **"tested as we are,"** and **"touched with the feeling of our infirmities"** (Hebrews 4:15).

Having passed through the vale of tears with His weeping friends, Jesus now approaches the mountaintop where the skies will explode with the sunrise of God's glory. The hour has come for life to triumph over death. Jesus ordered the stone removed. Martha, earthbound to the last, protested that he would stink because he had been in the tomb four days. But it is vital to note that her doubt did not deter Jesus. Too long have human feelings of doubt been the scapegoat in what is presumed to be unanswered prayer. Faith comes to the spirit with the coming of Christ. Apart from that faith there is no salvation; but with that same faith, one has access to all of God's power. If we pay any attention at all to how we feel, we will be constantly defeated. The power rests with God and not in the fickle emotions of the human mind. God's response to His children has more to do with timing than with supposed human inadequacies. If we have committed a matter to Christ, we may assume that whatever is, is God's answer for the present time. Since it is not often possible for human beings to know exactly what God is going to do, it is not possible to be absolutely certain except that He will

respond in His own way. If God chose to raise the dead on a certain occasion, He would do it inspite of our uncertainty as to whether He would do it or not. It is not likely that the human being would be absolutely certain that God would raise the dead on a given occasion. At any rate, it is comforting to know that Martha's uncertainty did not deter Jesus from fulfilling God's purpose in the raising of Lazarus.

The stone having been removed from the cave, the critical moment of confrontation has arrived. Jesus had openly declared His intentions in the raising of Lazarus. If He fails, His ministry will be over. He will either be branded as a charlatan and a deceiver, or a self-deceived fool. But that is the way of Christ. Boldly He makes claims, and promises, and commitments that no one else dares to make. The Bible, which is the revelation of Christ, goes on record again and again in such positive ways that it must either be true or be branded as a complete farce. In the Old Testament, written centuries before Christ, there were many precise prophecies about His coming that were fulfilled in minute detail. There were also prophecies concerning Israel and the Gentile nations which have certainly come to pass. For example, the prophet Daniel, writing in the 6th century B.C., predicted so accurately the second century conquest of Antiochus Epiphanes that many scholars cannot believe it was written prior to that event. Consequently, only on the grounds of unbelief, the book of Daniel was given a late date. In recent years archeological findings have authenticated the early date of Daniel and thus shown that it was indeed a remarkable prediction regarding the coming of Antiochus Epiphanes. There are scores of such exact predictions in the Old Testament which could be enumerated. In addition to this,

there are positive statements made about the results of prayer and faith. The promises are so numerous, and so specific, that were they to have proven unreliable, the Bible would long ago have been set aside as anything more than an interesting bit of antiquity. As it is, it still remains to this day the most widely read book in the world.

Not only is this a crucial moment for Jesus, but for all of mankind. There is no issue more vital to the meaning of life than death. If life is but a fleeting moment on the earth with oblivion at the end, then life is, for the most part, a farce; and all long-term goals and ambitions of very limited value. As the apostle Paul puts it, **“Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”** If Jesus can raise Lazarus at this moment, then hope springs eternal for all mankind.

John 11:38-44 (continued)

Jesus' Power Over Death—Unbroken Communion with The Father

In this moment when life and death hang in the balance, Jesus moves easily and confidently in His communion with the Father. **“I know that You are hearing Me at all times.”** The truth of the matter is that He was never at any time out of communion with the Father. Jesus was, of course, the earthly manifestation of the Father. In a certain sense, there was a oneness to the relationship between Christ and God that will not ever be true essentially between the believer and God. There will always, throughout eternity, be a distinction between man and God. God is distinct from man, even as He is distinct from the universe that He created. Otherwise, we would have Pantheism—a belief that God is everything and everything is God.

In another sense, however, we do have the Spirit of God flowing in us even as Christ had the Spirit of God flowing in Him. When Christ took upon Him a human form, He voluntarily emptied Himself and became a vessel of the Holy Spirit even as we today are vessels of the Holy Spirit. Unlike man, the nature which Jesus took upon Himself was sinless and in that respect different from us, but in the relationship which He bore to the Father of a human person filled with the Holy Spirit, He became an example of the relationship which any human being can bear to God. Thus, as He moved about on the earth, He was a vessel filled with the Holy Spirit. The believer today, possessing the Holy Spirit within

him, has a communion with the Father that is just as close as that which Jesus had. It is true for the believer as it was for Jesus, that possessing the Spirit of Christ within him, he can be assured that the Father is always tuned in to hear him. There is no need to get the Father's attention. If it were in God's plan to raise the dead through one of His children, He would do it just as easily as He did through Jesus. It is very important to spend time in prayer, but not because it takes time to get through to God; but rather because it is important to maintain communion with Him. In any relationship with another person, it is obvious that we do not talk to them only when we want to ask for something. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us assures us that we have God's ear continually.

It is important to pursue this matter of communion with God because we are dealing here in this passage with what is regarded as the most difficult of all miracles performed—the raising of the dead. Christians tend to have a graduating scale of difficulty with reference to the various kinds of miracles. It is presumed to be easier to get God to heal a cold, for instance, than to get Him to heal cancer. Similarly, it is thought easier to get Him to heal a cancer, than to get Him to raise the dead. The reason people think this way is because too much emphasis is placed upon the capacity or faith, or holiness of the one who

is asking, rather than upon the power of God.

The truth of the matter is, if one is a Christian, he has faith; if he does not have faith, he is not a Christian. It is not possible for a Christian to have faith sometimes but not all the time. Faith is as constantly in our spirits as Christ is in our spirits. It is true that there are some differences in terms of special gifts of faith, and it is also true that we do not always exercise our faith. But it would not be possible for us to be Christians without having faith constantly in our spirits. The believer needs only to rely on his faith. It should also be noted again that this faith is not a part of our feelings, emotionally. It does not matter how we feel about the faith that is in us. It matters only that we have the courage to act upon it. In the gift of faith, God gives to some the special capacity to act upon faith and to do certain exploits that He has commissioned them to perform. It must be realized, however, that every believer has the continuous presence and communion of the Holy Spirit within; that it is not ever a matter of calling God to come to us, but rather of taking notice of His presence.

There are two major barriers to this effectual communion between the believer and God. One of these is the willingness to accept the existing situation as that which God has Himself ordained. It is assumed that if certain circumstances do not change, or if they do not change according to our plan, God has not heard us. If we can only rely on the fact that God does always hear us, and then accept the situation as being from God, no matter what it is, then we can move in an attitude of confidence. The second barrier is the problem of worthiness. Most believers feel they are not good enough to receive help from God. They feel that either they do not have enough faith; or they have not always pleased God; or that they have not prayed in just the right way, or that perhaps they are not fervent enough. If we try to base God's communion with us on anything that we can do to merit His attention, we will never become confident in our praying. The flesh (that is, the natural man) will never let us rest, once we try to assess our own worthiness before God. And, indeed, no flesh is righteous before God. It is, after all, only our spirits that are filled with the presence of God, and not our flesh. Paul says, **"In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing."**

John 11:38-44 (continued)

Jesus' Power Over Death—Do Believers Have It Today?

Jesus, the Son of God, was, of course, sinless. To many believers, this made it possible for Him to have power not available to all. But, does the believer have to be sinless for God to work through him? In part, the issue turns on how we define sin. The classic passage on this matter is I John 3:19-24. Several things must be noted in this passage. First of all John is talking about the difference between those that are in the truth and those that are not. It is therefore the same situation as Romans 8, where Paul is comparing those that are in the spirit and those that are in the flesh. In that passage he sees those that are in the flesh as being God's enemies; and, therefore, they could not be Christians who are, for one or another reason, currently out of the will of God. Similarly, John uses the concept of sin and sinner to contrast those that are in God and those that are not. In I John 3:4 we read, **"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law"** (King James Version). The word translated **"transgression,"** is the Greek word *anomia*, which means lawlessness. This verse is better translated as follows: **"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."** This definition of sin makes the rest of the chapter understandable, because John says that if anyone commits sin he is not born of God, but is of the devil. By lawlessness, of course, we understand indifference to or antagonism toward the law, or will of God. (He is of course not

referring here just to the Law of Moses). When the spirit of Christ comes into the heart, it is no longer possible to be indifferent to the law or will of God. We may often through weakness, fail to follow the will of God, but that is not because we are indifferent to it, but rather, as Jesus pointed out, **"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** One of the most dependable signs that we are saved is the desire in our hearts to follow Christ and to please Him. Apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit, one could hardly care to please Christ. Wherever then, one acknowledges himself to be a sinner, and invites Christ to come into his spirit, the Spirit of Christ will take up residence within, and there will be an immediate change of general attitude toward the things of God. There may not be strong feelings—perhaps no emotions at all—but the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit will be known by the fact that one will care about Christ. When the Holy Spirit comes in, He brings with Him faith which is essential for there to be any interaction with God at all. This faith is confirmed, not by the ability to "get things from God," but by the fact that one has the interest and capacity to approach God at all. Specifically, our communion is with Jesus Christ. Christ is, in fact, the face of God to man. The moment Christ comes into our spirit, He is as close to us as He ever will be. It is misleading to think in terms of getting nearer to Him by climbing the ladder of good conduct.

There is another use of the word *sin* in the Bible. The term is sometimes applied to what we might call trespasses, or offenses. These are matters of conduct. They do not separate us from God in the way that one is separated as an unbeliever. Our conduct is, of course, very important to God, and He wants us to please Him at all times, but He recognizes the inadequacy of the human nature. All of the characters in the Bible, and the writers of it as well, are seen in a constant struggle with the flesh, or the human nature. A good example of this struggle is given us in the seventh chapter of Romans, which should be read at this point. John talks about this kind of sin in I John 2:1. **“My little children, I am writing these things to you that you do not sin. And if one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One”** (A.T.). Here, he is obviously addressing the children of God; and he is allowing for the possibility that there could be sins committed, and encouraging them to believe that there is a place of forgiveness and help with God. In referring to, these matters of conduct, whether we use the term sin, or offense, or trespass it is obvious that forgiveness needs to be sought from God and restoration needs to take place. The presence of such sin in the life can bring a barrier between one and God, not because the Spirit of God leaves us, but because we have difficulty communicating with Him when we are troubled in our consciences. If we have offended God, our spirits will surely be troubled, and we will know it. If our spirits are not troubled, then we must conclude that things are well between ourselves and God.

It is never wise to use answers to prayer as the gauge of God’s attitudes toward us. This can be extremely confusing. Very often,

Christians conclude that God has not answered their prayers because things have not happened the way they thought they should, and then they begin to probe themselves and go through the agonies of self-examination to determine why. This is very unsound. One must never conclude that God has not heard the prayer on account of sin. God always hears our prayers. He may elect to discipline us if we have been out of hand, but if He is going to do that it will be very clear to us that we are being disciplined. He does not do as many parents, who turn a deaf ear to their children as punishment for wrongdoing. Human beings have a habit of punishing each other by the silent treatment, but that is not God’s case. The era of the New Covenant, brought the inner presence of the Spirit to us in such a way that He is always with us. It is not like it was in the Old Testament when God’s response to Israel brought 400 years of silence. But the children of Israel at that time did not possess the Spirit of Christ within them. God deals with His people in an entirely different way today. Our prayer life will be far more stable if we conclude that God always hears us; and if there is some matter He is disturbed about, He will make it clear to us. We always have access to Him, and should never hang back because of some supposed offense or sin. If we feel uneasy about something, the best thing to do is to confess it to the Lord and get His forgiveness. If we do not know of anything that we are doing or have done that God is dealing with us about, it is not wise to go on a “fishing expedition” in order to find it. Satan can use these fishing trips to beat us down.

This entire discussion, which may seem like quite a detour, has a very important purpose. Since we are dealing here with the crucial issue of the power to raise the dead;

and since the Bible indicates that we who have the Spirit of Christ will not only do the works that He did, but also greater works, it is fair to ask whether or not the average Christian would be able to raise the dead. The answer to this question lies in the focus that we have been giving here on the matter of communion with God. The believer who realizes the continuous presence of Christ within his spirit will also realize that if it is in the will of God to perform any miracle, including the raising of the dead, God can do it as well through one believer as another. There is, of course, the indication that some have special gifts in this line, and that must be taken into consideration. However, when it came to raising the dead; or casting out demons; or healing the sick; or making the blind see, Christ moved easily within the framework of fulfilling God's purposes, accepting the fact that the Father was working through Him at all times. The believer today has access to the same power, because he has the same spirit within him that Christ had. He has the ear of the Father continually, as Christ had. It is simply a matter of recognizing this truth; and assuming that whatever God wants to do through us or for us, He will do, without any necessity of our producing special conditions of piety or confidence in the flesh. If God is displeased with us, He will deal with us directly about it and effect the reconciliation by an interaction with our spirits. If we are uneasy about something in our lives, then we should make it right, but we should never go through agonizing self-analysis merely because of some supposed failure on God's part to answer our prayers. As children of God we have every right to say

with Jesus, **"I know that you are hearing Me at all times."**

Since Jesus knew that God had heard Him, and that it was then the will of God to raise Lazarus from the dead, there remained the simple necessity of giving the order for Lazarus to come forth. And so the order was given, not in long and pious petitions, like the Pharisees, **"who thought they would be heard for their much speaking;"** but in a simple command, as with the countless, deliverances that Christ had effected throughout His ministry on the earth. And the dead man lived again. Nor was Jesus surprised in the least. Matter of factly, He said, **"Loose him and let him go."**

If it seems that there has been undue attention given to what may appear to be side issues, let it be observed that in this chapter whose subject is the raising of Lazarus, out of the forty-four verses we have covered, only seven deal with the actual event, while the other thirty-seven deal with the subjects that we have just been talking about. While there is no doubt a symbolism here having to do with the spiritual resurrection of our dead spirits (including a metaphorical bondage in the grave clothes of a sin-cursed world), the primary objective of Jesus in this miraculous episode, was the glorifying of God. **"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"** If we could but receive the resurrection life of Christ in our spirits, and go in the reality of His abiding presence within us with the same confidence that Jesus had, how deep would be the peace within us, and how great would be the glorifying of God through us.

John 11:45-55

TRANSLATION

Many of the Jews then who had come to Mary and had beheld the things which He [Jesus] had done, believed on Him; but certain of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. The chief priests and Pharisees then brought together the Sanhedrin, and were saying, "What shall we do, because this Man is doing many miracles? If we let Him thus alone, all will believe on Him; and the Romans will come and will take away both our place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You do not know anything at all, nor consider it expedient for you that one man should die on behalf of the people and that the whole nation should not perish." But this he said not from himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die on behalf of the nations; and not on behalf of the nations only but that also the children of God who had been scattered should be gathered together in one. From that day then they resolved to kill Him. Jesus then was no longer walking boldly among the Jews, but went away from there unto the region near the desert, unto a city called Ephraim, and there He remained with His disciples. And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up unto Jerusalem out of the region before the Passover in order that they might purify themselves. They were seeking Jesus then and were saying with one another, standing in the temple, "What do you think? That He will not come to the feast at all?" Now the chief priests and Pharisees had given commandment that if anyone should know where He was he should make it known so that they might seize Him.

COMMENTARY

The Dilemma of the Pharisees—Submit to Jesus or Kill Him

The Pharisees could not deny the validity of the miracles of Jesus. For them it was never really a question of truth but submission. Their minds had become prisoners of political expedience and pious self-interest. They admitted that He had done many

miracles but that if they left Him alone He would stir up trouble and the Romans would come in and take away their place as rulers over the people. If they were saying this honestly, it was obviously self-deception because as a matter of fact, when

the representative of Rome, Pilate later sought to save Jesus, the Pharisees would not hear of it. So they had evidently tried to justify their attitude toward Jesus by convincing themselves that their real concern was for the nation. Caiaphus, who was high priest that year, took the lead in suggesting that the most effective answer to the problem was to kill Jesus. This he suggested to the Sanhedrin, (a body of Jewish leaders, seventy-one in number, taken from among the scribes and Pharisees and leading men of the Jewish community). He had hastily called the group together after the disquieting episode of Lazarus, to determine how they could prevent a wholesale following of Jesus on the basis of the magnitude of the miracle. Apparently the Sanhedrin had recoiled at the thought of slaying Jesus, because Caiaphus seemed to rather sharply rebuke them for their inability to see the seriousness of the issue. A system that is based on religious ritual and regulation is always threatened by a living faith which finds its satisfaction in power and performance. Jesus was giving the people life and hope; the Pharisees had given them only empty promises and endless bondage.

The pursuit of the truth of God is a life and death matter. To Jesus, the game-playing of the Pharisees was intolerable. Jesus was locked in mortal conflict with the Pharisees; not as with earnest men seeking the truth, but as with agents of Satan hindering men from coming to the truth. They hated Him because deep inside they knew He was right about them. This constant conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees runs as a continuous stream throughout the Gospel narratives. To some it may seem a negative approach, almost paranoid in terms of modern psychological theory. But, if we would understand things the way God wants us to understand them, we must pay

attention not to the things that the human mind would emphasize, but the things that God has emphasized.

Whatever one's belief about Jesus Christ may be, there is no question but what He remains to this day (even to the secular historian), one of the most controversial, if not the most significant figures in history. It is remarkable that the life of Jesus is told us with such brevity. It is even more remarkable that the most spectacular of episodes in His life are told with such simplicity. But, it is also remarkable that so much attention is given to certain facets of His life which the average biographer would have passed over rather lightly. Thus, Jesus' dialogues and conflicts with the Pharisees are given in great detail, whereas hundreds of episodes of healing are rather lightly passed over. If we are to extract from the Scriptures, the things which God wants us to know, rather than merely giving human speculation about the Implications of the narratives, we must give attention to the principle of "making much of that which God makes much of."

The most important theme in all the Bible, of course, is the revelation of God; with all of the aspects of the Godhead, including Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Secondly, there is the revelation of God's relationship to man, including the development of what man is as the creation of God. In the third place there is the universal conflict between God and Satan; first of all in Satan's revolt against God, and then in Satan's effort to spoil God's creation. The fourth theme of major importance then would be God's redemptive process in the recovery of man from Satan's grip. Thus, in the biblical story of God and man, covering thousands of years of human history in one rather brief volume, it is obvious that the conflict occupies a most central place. It is apparent

that from the moment of the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden to the moment of his triumphant restoration as given in the book of Revelation, the entire meaning of man's life on the earth must be seen in the context of the conflict.

A very appropriate analogy would be a history of France, for instance, during World War II. For a period of time, France was occupied by the Nazis. There might be a chapter at the beginning of the book presenting the French people in their original culture, but the central thrust of the book would be to portray a condition of conflict. The true meaning and culture of the French people would be distorted by the conditions of the German Occupation. There came a moment when the world God had created was occupied by Satan. From that day until the day when Satan will be destroyed, the world must be seen and understood in the light of this Occupation. Conditions are abnormal in terms of God's original intentions, and in terms of the original characteristics of man himself. We must view the Bible then as a record not of the world and of man as God intended them to be, but in the abnormal conditions of the Satanic Occupation of the world. One of the central themes of the Bible, then, is conflict. In the records of the reign of David, for instance, the entire history of David is told in terms of the many battles and conflicts that David had. So also in the record of the other characters of the Bible. They are always seen in conflict.

Now comes Jesus; and we learn very little of His life in Capernaum, which was a rather simple village life where He apparently worked as a carpenter and associated with various ones in the village. With a brief introduction regarding His very special birth, we immediately encounter Jesus at the waters of Jordan

being baptized and beginning His earthly ministry. From that moment until the time that He is nailed on the cross, His life is a continual conflict. If one had been living in Paris in 1944, his whole lifestyle would have been altered in terms of the German Occupation. He would have had to accept privations and sacrifices that were forced upon the French people at that time. His life would have been very austere indeed. The only way that he could have enjoyed any measure of ease or luxury would have been to have collaborated with the enemy; which of course, a number of people did to their sorrow.

The Christian, living in the world today, is in the same position. The world that he lives in was indeed created by God, but the presence of the Occupation forces of Satan alters that condition considerably. He must assume that his life will be severely affected by the presence of the enemy. He must also realize that the only way he could enjoy a life of ease in this world would be to collaborate with the enemy. Of course, those that did collaborate with the enemy in France paid a heavy price for it. And, similarly, those who shun the battle today and seek for ease in this world will pay a very heavy price for it. For the believer then, life on this earth is distorted from its original meaning as God intended, by the presence of the Occupation forces of Satan. A life of good things as far as this world is concerned is the exception rather than the rule and only possible when God, for reasons of His own, may choose to allow them.

The Pharisees were to Jesus what the Phillistines were to David—the constant symbol of satanic opposition. The raising of Lazarus, which should have brought to his knees, any earnest seeker after truth, was to the Pharisees merely another occasion of

envy, to be twisted into a justification for the slaying of their hated enemy. Jesus did not engage in heroic game-playing. The life and death issues of His mission were far too important for that. When it was necessary to His purpose to confront the enemy, He

did so with boldness; but now, since His hour had not yet come, He slipped away to a desert village and there remained with His disciples until that time when He would set Himself to go to Jerusalem and to His death.

John 12:1-11

TRANSLATION

Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came unto Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They made then supper for Him there, and Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those who were reclining [at supper] with Him. Mary then took a pound of pure spikenard ointment, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. And Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (who was about to betray Him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denaril and given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and, holding the moneybag, carried what was put in it. Jesus then said, "Let her alone that she may observe it unto the day of My burial; for the poor you have always with yourselves, but Me you do not have always." A large crowd of the Jews then (knowing that He was there), came also, not on account of Jesus only, but that they might see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead. The chief priests then consulted together that they might kill Lazarus also, because many of the Jews had gone away and believed on Jesus because of him.

COMMENTARY

Jesus Begins the Way of the Cross—Anointed by Mary of Bethany

From the beginning, Jesus had shunned the noble—both religious and secular—and companied, instead with the common people; the simple sheep of Israel; or the *am ha'aretz*, as they were called by the Jews. He spurned the sophisticated religious dribble of the Pharisees for the wholesome, if unlearned, efforts of the common people to maintain their identity with God. He dined openly and unashamedly with the outcasts and sinners. Among His own disciples, for example, was a Publican, who was one of the most despised of all Jews,

because he collaborated with the Roman government in the collecting of taxes from his own fellow countrymen. Jesus did not waste any time crusading with pious slogans in the interests of equality, but His life was a constant testimony to His belief that God was no respecter of persons.

It was fitting then that a simple young woman, who was a nobody in the eyes of the religious leadership, should be the one to have the honor of anointing Jesus for the

supreme sacrifice which He would make for all mankind.

The episode had taken place in the home of Simon, the leper. The very phrase is a shaft of glory from God, because it was so incredible that a leper should ever be restored to any kind of a normal life, much less to having his own house. Jesus, of course, had been responsible for his healing. If anyone would know the meaning of "outcast," it would be Simon. Also assembled with this ill-assorted lot was Judas Iscariot, who was not only a thief but who also would shortly betray Jesus. So among those gathered at this dinner were the outcasts of Israel—thieves and Publicans and sinners, and lepers, all gathered at the Passover season to be part of those who would share in this crucial and historical moment when the way of the cross for Jesus and the dawning of hope for mankind would be sanctified by the anointing of Jesus with the precious ointment brought forth as the offering of a cleansed sinner—a young woman from the village of Bethany.

In addition to those mentioned, there was also Lazarus, of course, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and because of whom came a contingent from the Pharisees, who had been mightily plagued by this living example of Jesus' power. It was a most fitting group to join with Jesus in the beginning moments of His road to the cross. There were the repentant and the unrepentant; the self-righteous and the unrighteous; the proud and the lowly; the living and the dead. It was a cross-section of the stream of humanity that would, through the ages, face Christ and make a choice—some unto life, and some unto death.

It was perhaps Mary's only real treasure; it was worth a great deal of money. The alabaster container held about twelve ounces of pure spikenard. The thief, who ought to know, considered it to be worth about three hundred denarii. In calculating relative values of ancient money, it is necessary to consider what that money would buy or what it represented, rather than the exact designation as a coin. Apparently, from one of Jesus' parables, a denarius at that time was considered a fairly acceptable day's wages for a field hand. That figure today would be somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty dollars. The ointment, or perfume which Mary had was then worth about three hundred day's wages. All things considered, and depending upon what a day's wages would buy in those days, it was quite a treasure. Not only was all her earthly treasure poured out upon Jesus, but her hair, which was the crowning glory of her physical person, was used to wipe His feet. No sacrifice on earth would ever more deeply touch the heart of Jesus; nor would it ever be forgotten. To this day, according to Jesus' own decree, the episode would accompany the revelation of God's own sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As usual, the worth of devotion was misunderstood by the group. Apparently the matter caused a considerable outcry. Judas had begun the clamor, but apparently others had picked up the refrain, and Jesus finally had to rescue Mary from the harassment. The attitude of Judas was, of course, in keeping with his allegiance to Satan; however, with the others, from whom we would have expected more, it is instructive to see how easily the natural mind can be led off by satanic influences. Mary's action was certainly unreasonable by human standards, but Jesus' plain and continual teaching had

always been in sharp contrast to these materialistic values. The inconsistency of Jesus' disciples is not uncommon today. It is well to realize that when the attitudes of believers are parallel with the attitudes of unbelievers, especially as they relate to matters of the church or of faith, they are likely to be in contradiction to the attitudes

of Jesus. Judas had led the attack upon Mary, and others there followed after him, insensitive to the true author of the accusation. As far as Jesus is concerned, we learn the value that He attaches to devotion. To Him, it was perfectly appropriate that this young woman should pour out at His feet, all that she possessed.

John 12:1-11 (continued)

The Sanctified Ointment—Symbol of the Holy Spirit

But what now does the Holy Spirit want to teach us by the inclusion of this episode in the Gospel narratives? Strictly speaking, the Gospels should not be seen as chronological biographies of the life of Jesus. They are rather a series of episodes and discourses, whose main purpose is to reveal to us as completely as possible, the nature of Jesus Christ, and therefore of God. These episodes are really very much like cameos. Originally, the word, “cameo,” referred to an exquisitely carved gem, but later came to be used of literary pieces that would give intricate insights into the character of a person or an event. Sometimes these events occur only in one of the Gospels, but at other times they are included in two or three or even four of them.

When these cameos occur in more than one of the Gospels, we often find apparent discrepancies in the details, or the facts. If we see these events as “cameos” we may then realize that the author is looking at the event from a different point of view. He may be including details that other authors did not include, or he may be leaving out elements that were included in others. It is not at all a matter of one or the other of the writers being inaccurate, but rather looking at the event from a different perspective, especially with a view to bringing out special meanings. It is almost like the art of “holography” (three-dimensional photography). All four Gospels taken together present a complete picture of

Christ, or as nearly complete as the human mind is able to grasp.

The anointing at Bethany is such a cameo. It is an exquisitely sculptured insight into the nature of Jesus, and also of some of His followers. Picture the setting for a moment. We are in the home of Simon, the leper. It is a house full of miracles. There is Simon, who by the touch of Jesus, was a leper no more; there was Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead; there was Matthew the tax collector who by the impact of Jesus was delivered from a life of extortion; and there was Mary, a simple young woman from a small village whose sacrifice would become an example of devotion to the world. Martha is bustling about, concerned with the serving; Mary is at the feet of Jesus pouring out her devotion to Him. Judas, the agent of Satan, a liar and thief like his master, occupies himself with stirring up trouble by accusations that will rob Mary of the heart and joy of her act of devotion. He is joined in this shabby effort by some of the disciples, whose devotion to reason had obscured their devotion to Christ, and made them ready accomplices in the attack on Mary. In the midst of these diverse moods, Jesus moves easily among the assembled disciples. He was fully aware of the implications of the human nature. He was not always pleased with His disciples, but neither did He condemn them in the terms with which He condemned the Pharisees. Judas, of course, was another matter. He was an enemy within the gates and would

have to be dealt with later on a different basis. Jesus rebuked the disciples for troubling Mary, and reveals to them the rather startling truth that she was doing this by divine appointment as a preparation for His sacrifice.

In symbol, the anointing of Jesus here carries us back to the anointing of the high priest in the Old Testament. In Matthew's account of the anointing at Bethany, he tells us that Mary poured the ointment on Jesus' head. John indicates that she anointed His feet. Probably both were true, but John is focusing on the tender devotion with which Mary had been wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. One of the most beautiful psalms that David ever wrote describes the moment of the anointing of the high priest as follows: **"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever more"** (Psalm 133). Here, David applies the event as a symbol of unity, but it is obviously a reference to the Holy Spirit who brings about that unity.

From the moment that the Spirit of God hovered over the chaos of the deep, and brought forth the orderly creation, the Holy Spirit has been an essential part of all God's dealings with man on the earth. By Him, the power and presence of God is ministered to man. Thus, the high priest could hardly launch upon his sacred service without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon him, as symbolized by the anointing oil (Exodus 30). This pouring out of oil is everywhere a symbol of the pouring out of

the Holy Spirit upon man. The whole system of Jewish sacrifices was only valid insofar as the Spirit of God accompanied the sacrifice. When Israel rebelled against God and was drawn away into idolatry, even the sacrifices which they offered were a stench in God's nostrils, because they were not accompanied by the Spirit.

So Jesus must have a special anointing for His sacrifice. Jesus was, of course, already filled with the Holy Spirit, but the symbolism must be there as in the baptism at the Jordan, and the transfiguration on the Holy Mount. The Holy Spirit is the only means through which man and God can interact. That is why Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, because rejection of the Holy Spirit cuts the lifeline to God.

At the Jordan River, when Jesus began His earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit was symbolized by a dove. The presence of the Holy Spirit sealed Jesus' acceptance as the mediator between God and man. On the Mount of Transfiguration a radiant cloud signaled the presence of the Holy Spirit once again, and the divine acceptance of Jesus' life on the earth as the "Lamb without blemish." Now at Bethany, the Holy Spirit once more is manifested in the sanctified ointment that became the preparatory anointing for Jesus' final sacrifice. Jesus was at once the priest and the sacrifice as the book of Hebrews so clearly indicates.

On this casual occasion, before the Passover, when Jesus and His disciples had come together for dinner, there had not been much in the way of direct teaching, but a powerful witness had been given by the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus; and the impact of it would leave an indelible impression. John, writing about the

incident perhaps fifty years later, recalled that the aroma of the ointment filled the whole room.

There is much about Christ that we can never really comprehend in our human minds, but the Holy Spirit has a way of ministering the truth to our spirits quite apart from the normal processes of human thought. If such was the case with the disciples it is even more true of us today, nearly two thousand years removed from the events of which the disciples wrote. It is most essential, in reading of these events, that we pray that the Holy Spirit will apply them to our hearts beyond our understanding. This is especially true when it comes to the great mysteries of redemption. How it is that God can Himself

become man; and be a sacrifice for us; and through that sacrifice put away sin, is a mystery that is beyond our capacity to handle. But, it is not necessary for us to handle it in the process of the mind. It is very clear in the New Testament teaching that God ministers to us in the spirit in ways that go beyond the mind. Thus, for example, peace and love and joy and faith are qualities that we possess through Christ in our spirit, even though often as far as the human emotion is concerned we may be in distress and turmoil. When it comes to the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, it is best to ask the Holy Spirit to make the application to us as only He can; and to merely rest in the accomplished reality of our eternal redemption.

John 12:12-19

TRANSLATION

On the next day a great crowd which had come unto the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, took palm branches and went out to meet Him and were crying, "Hosanna; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel." And Jesus having found a little donkey sat on it, even as it is written, "Do not fear, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming, seated upon the colt of a donkey." These things His disciples did not know at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and these things had been done to Him. The crowd then was bearing witness, which had been with Him when He had called Lazarus from the tomb and had raised him from the dead. For this reason the crowd met Him, because they heard that He had done this miracle. The Pharisees then said to themselves, you see that you have no effect at all; behold the world has gone away after Him.

COMMENTARY

The King of the Jews Enters Jerusalem in Triumph—Riding on a Donkey

From the manger-cradle at Bethlehem to the cross on Golgotha, Jesus walked the earth in lowliness and poverty. He spent His early years in menial labor in an obscure village in a tiny country, populated by a people despised more than any other people on earth. When He finally began His ministry, He went first to the Jordan River and was plunged into it by a "wild man" from the wilderness called John the Baptist. Among His own people He went day by day throughout the land, quietly and patiently ministering to the sick and afflicted of Israel. He was a vagabond who called no place His home, but was dependent upon the hospitality of various of His followers whom He had helped. He was

continually subjected to the ridicule and hatred of the leaders of the religious structure which held the Jewish people together. His tendency to gravitate to the outcast and the sinner made Him little more than an outcast Himself. When He finally gathered about Him a small band of disciples, He chose them from among the simple, unlearned men, who had no possibility of acceptance by the religious hierarchy of the day, or even the political rulers of the land. As of the day of His death, there seemed little hope for anything but oblivion for the fellowship of Messianic believers that hid themselves in fear from their Jewish brethren. To all practical purposes, Jesus' mission seemed a travesty

upon the redemptive purposes of God for mankind.

Such were the absurd beginnings of the conquest by Jesus of the forces of evil—a conquest which would sweep the earth and shatter the gates of hell. The paradox of course, is that Jesus wanted a band who would have not the slightest chance of succeeding apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. And even then, the only possible success that could be achieved would be in the realm of the spirit and not the flesh.

The extent to which the followers of Christ today have departed from this principle is the extent to which Satan has succeeded in rendering their weapons powerless. Satan is delighted for people to achieve success in the visible realm of the flesh, both religious and secular, because then he has sidetracked the main thrust, which is in the

realm of the spirit. He knows that in the realm of the spirit he is up against the forces of God and has no hope of success, whereas in terms of the visible material world, he is its chief ruler.

The apostle Paul learned this lesson well. And in the first chapter of his first letter to the people at Corinth, he said that God had chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are. (The reader is referred to the first two chapters of the epistle). One of the plainest lessons of Scripture is given us by Zechariah—“**Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,**” ‘saith the **Lord of Hosts**’ (Zechariah 4:6). The ultimate episode in Jesus’ exposure of the vanity of the flesh came in the ride to Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

John 12:12-19 (continued)

The Vessel is of Clay—That the Power May Be of God

The sacred anointing of Jesus for His final sacrifice and triumph, was done, not by a high priest, but by a common village maiden; and the anointing oil was not the holy ointment of the priesthood (see Exodus 30), but an ointment made from the natural elements which were available to all. Just so, for the triumphal procession in which the conquering King would enter the Holy City, and establish His irrevocable claim to sovereignty, not only over God's holy people, Israel, but also over the entire world—for this triumphal procession, Jesus chose a donkey.

And what a spectacle it was! What a priceless travesty upon the empty and artificial pomp and splendor of the Roman Empire; and indeed of all the would-be rulers of the world who were naught but puppets of Satan. Imagine the scene—Jesus astride a donkey; nay, the colt of a donkey, His feet almost dragging the ground, and the donkey all but buried under the garments that had been hastily thrown across it; an ill-assorted band of followers from the villagers around Bethany, together with another group that had met them from Jerusalem. And there were the festive palm branches strewn along the path and waved in the air in mock imitation of the glorious procession of the Roman conquerors.

This nondescript band, making its way over the winding, rocky road that led from Bethany to Jerusalem, certainly gave no impression whatsoever of triumph. And yet

the day would come when this same band would challenge the Jewish hierarchy; resist the power of the Roman Empire; and storm the very gates of hell, which would not prevail against them. There was not in all the world a group of people less likely to accomplish this. But this of course was totally in keeping with the heart of the message not only of Jesus, but also of the prophets and the men of God through the ages. Moses challenged the Pharaoh of Egypt and delivered God's people with a shepherd's staff; David met Goliath with a sling shot; and the episodes are endless. The prophet Zechariah, who also foretold this event of the procession to Jerusalem, communicated God's words to Zerubbabel, **"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit."** 'saith the Lord of Hosts.' Jesus, on the way to the cross, said to His disciples, **"Without Me ye can do nothing."** And the apostle Paul, charged with the major responsibility of giving to the church God's revelation of truth, said, **"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God"** (II Corinthians 3:5).

Perhaps the most prominent single teaching in all the Bible is that man is helpless without God. It is, of course, true, that a great many people live without God in their lives. They think that they are doing quite nicely without Him. The fact of the matter is, however, that they could not even take a breath without God. But apart

from that, the Scripture points out that all things man does on the earth apart from God are doomed to disintegration. Peter says that the earth and all its works are going to be burned up (II Peter 3:10). He further indicates that people are willfully ignorant of this truth (II Peter 3:5). So that little procession, which seemed so ludicrous to the world, was in fact quite in keeping with the processes and purposes of God throughout the Bible.

It had been unquestionably a spectacle ordered by God. It had been prophesied by His prophet Zechariah many centuries earlier. Zechariah had gone back from the captivity in Babylon, accompanying Zerubbabel, who was commissioned to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Zechariah was encouraging Zerubbabel in this task, and was prophesying concerning the total restoration of God's people in the days to come. In the midst of continuous difficulties that threatened the completion of the temple, Zechariah was encouraging Zerubbabel to realize that it was not his own strength but the power of God that would prevail. As he was telling him of the preservation of Jerusalem from the enemies of God, he gave this prophecy regarding the coming Messiah. **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King commeth unto thee: He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass”** (Zechariah 9:9). In context, it is a plain declaration that the entire redemptive plan of God for the world is to depend, not upon fleshly might, but upon the power of God working through His Holy Spirit. As in the episode of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, where the meager lunch of a small lad became the resource for the feeding of the multitudes, so it is to be understood that however feeble and

inadequate the human effort, the power of God will make up the difference. The greatest miracle in all the world is that the power of God can function in and through human persons.

But what was in the minds of the followers of Jesus as they joined in this procession? Did they have any idea at all of what the implications were of this episode? In verse 16, it indicates quite plainly that the disciples did not know what was taking place at that time, but only after Jesus was glorified. Why then did they join in this procession? The text tells us quite plainly that the crowd had been mightily affected by the raising of Lazarus, and had joined with Him to give witness to His power as a prophet. They did not at this time see Him as the Messiah. But, as in the case of Martha when Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus, there was very little sensitivity to what God was actually doing. But again, as in the case of the raising of Lazarus, the weakness of the people did not deter the purposes of God. It is in this respect that one can say it was altogether God's spectacle. It was indeed God who was mocking the Roman Empire and the rulers of the world; it was God who was disowning the pomp and glory of this earth; it was God who was revealing to man that He would take the weak and common and ignoble things of the world to confound the mighty. And it was God who was revealing to the world that His grand purposes for man could not be contained in the weak and beggarly elements of this world, but could only be expressed in the meaning and power of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus would later tell Pilate, the symbol of earthly power and glory, **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** Long after the earth and all its works have been burned up, the **“spirits of just men made perfect,”** shall reign eternally with God.

The Pharisees, as usual, were standing on the sidelines, totally blind to the purposes of God whom they claimed to represent. With darkened countenance and envious heart, they stood opposed to the central purposes of God that were here being revealed. In the account of this episode given by Matthew, the Pharisees were incensed at the tumult, perhaps because children were joining in what seemed to them a profaning of sacred phrases. Once again, Jesus ran them through with a sword. In effect He said, "You won't praise Me properly, so these common people have

to, and if they didn't do it the very rocks would sing My praises" (see Matthew 21 and Luke 19). The whole universe is filled with the energy of God. There is no way that man or devil can thwart that power. Through man and nature alike the light and energy of God irrepressibly explodes in eternal glory. **"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us"** (II Corinthians 4:6, 7).

John 12:20-36

TRANSLATION

Now there were certain Greeks of those who were going up to worship at the feast; these then came to Phillip who was from Bethsaida of Galilee and were inquiring of him saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Phillip came and spoke to Andrew; Phillip and Andrew came and spoke to Jesus. And Jesus answered them saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. I tell you the absolute truth, except the kernel of grain fall into the ground and die, it remains by itself alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life is losing it, and he who hates his life in this world shall preserve it unto eternal life. If one serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there also shall My servant be; if one serve Me My Father will honor him.

"Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this reason I came unto this hour. 'Father, glorify Your name.'" A voice then came out of heaven, "I have both glorified It and will glorify It again." The crowd then which stood and heard, were saying, "it thundered;" others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice came not for My sake, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world shall be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, shall draw all to Myself." This He was saying, signifying by what sort of death He was about to die. The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard from the Law that Christ abides forever, and how do You say that it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus then said to them, "The Light is among you for yet a little time. Walk as you have the Light, lest the darkness overtake you; and he who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. As you have the Light, believe in the Light, in order that you may be the children of Light."

COMMENTARY

The Greeks Learn From Jesus the Ultimate Truth About Life and Death

For centuries the Greeks had regarded themselves as the “light-bearers” of the world. As far as secular philosophy is concerned, their claim was not without substance. In the development of Western civilization there had been the Greek century from about 500 B.C. to 400 B.C., which has been known as the “Golden Age of Greece.” The Greek language had developed to a precision unmatched by any language of the time, and perhaps even of the present era. The capacity of the language for precise expression made it possible for the Greeks to present philosophical ideas at a level that had not, at that point, been possible. In the ancient languages of the Middle East, the limits were such that the languages lent themselves to narrative and description, but not to abstract thoughts. There is very little of philosophical writing in that period of time. Even the Hebrew of the Old Testament is limited in its capacity for the kind of precise expression that we have in the New Testament, which was written in Greek. So the Greeks were the forerunners of modern philosophy. They boasted such names as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who have remained to this day the symbols of human philosophical thought. Paul brings out this contrast in his first letter to the people of Corinth, when he said that the Greeks were seeking after wisdom and the Jews were seeking after signs, or miracles.

To the Greek philosophers, the realm of ideas was the true reality. Plato used the word “logos,” to identify this eternal realm of idea. John picked up this word in the first chapter of his Gospel, and showed that the true reality was to be found not in the world of human ideas, but God’s ideas as expressed in Christ, the true Logos—the revelation of God. (For a further discussion see Chapter 1 of this Commentary).

In addition to their preoccupation with wisdom, the Greeks were also great lovers of life. They were the foundation of much of Western culture in language and the arts. The language and culture of the Greeks provided a more suitable vehicle for the presentation of the simple but profound truths of God to the world. The Eastern culture tends more to the mystical and the esoteric. In the providence of God, when the Greeks won out over the Persians in the 5th century B.C., the predominance of the Greek culture over the Eastern culture of the Persians, was established. Later on, Alexander the Great from Macedonia, was so impressed with the Greek culture that when he had conquered the Greeks, he decided to preserve that culture and establish it throughout the Middle East. It seems obvious that God had Himself been responsible for the development and preservation of a language and culture which would be suitable for the spread of His revelation throughout the world. The glory of the Greeks faded rapidly after the Peloponnesian wars around 400 B.C., but the language emerged as God’s instrument of revelation.

Now come the Greeks seeking Jesus. These who came were apparently true Greeks and not merely Hellenists. The original name for Greece was Hellas. When Alexander the Great spread the Greek culture throughout the Middle East; those who participated in this were called Hellenistic. The true Greeks were Hellenic, or Hellenes. The Greeks who came to Jesus were true Hellenes. In addition to this, they were “Proselytes.” Proselytes were Gentiles who had become adherents to the Jewish religion. The true Proselyte had been circumcised, as a matter of fact, and, to the degree that it was possible, identified himself with the Jewish religious community. The fact that these Greeks had

so identified themselves, and were coming to the feast certainly makes it clear that they did have a desire to find the truth beyond the normal philosophical theories of their own people. Why they wanted to see Jesus is not altogether certain. Perhaps they were looking for something more satisfying than the Jewish faith, or perhaps they were merely curious, but, in either event, Jesus sent them away with a very penetrating revelation of the true meaning of life and death. As usual Jesus sliced through the veneer, and touched immediately the heart of the Greek problem—the glorifying of man and of life in this world.

In one moment of time Jesus turns into dust all the expectations of earthly glory. **“Except the kernel of grain fall into the ground and die it abides alone by itself.”** Everything on this earth is slated for death. Every leaf that comes on the tree in the springtime begins its inevitable numbering of days until it drops off in the fall. In a sense we are not so much in the “land of the living” as in the “land of the dying.” All of Jesus’ teaching from the beginning has focused on the transiency and decadence of this world. The spirit has eternal continuity, but in the process of its growth and development, the flesh must die. Jesus uses the figure of the seed here to symbolize the fact that life on the earth is a temporary thing, whose main purpose is to give life and growth to the spirit. This is what is meant by “bearing fruit” (not winning souls). Life on this earth is a daily dying; so declared Jesus and the apostles. Paul says, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son**

of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20 A.T.). In another figure, the spirit is like the object of art, and life on this earth like the mold around it. It matters not how unappealing may be the mold; what is important is the object of art that is being formed within. The Holy Spirit is the catalyst, who takes the daily experiences of our lives and translates them into growth for the spirit. Jesus is teaching here that the whole meaning of life on the earth is a process of dying to earthly goals and ambitions and desires, and focusing on the growth of the spirit.

A note of caution must be given here. It is best to let Christ do the slaying. This He can do as the architect of our circumstances, because He knows how best to handle them in terms of our own personal needs. If we try to shape ourselves up, or engineer our own circumstances, we will surely fail. God is the potter; we are but the clay. We can only be the seed; the death of the seed belongs to God. Jesus taught, not that we should take our life, but rather that we should not cling to it. The measure of our peace is proportionate to the measure of our willingness to let go of those things that bind us to the earth.

This would have been a shattering moment to the Greeks whose lives were so much given to the pursuit of beauty and enjoyment in this world. To Jesus, the magnificence of man could only be worthily utilized in total commitment to fulfilling God’s purpose on the earth and serving Him throughout eternity. Identity with Christ is the ultimate glory for man—the ultimate in God’s creation.

John 12:20-36 (continued)

Jesus Reflects on His Approaching Death

Jesus was deeply troubled—not with the surface agitations of the normal human frustrations, but with a deep-seated turbulence that came from the continual confrontation with the cataclysmic, life-and-death issues of man and God in the universe. It was one thing to see the issues from the perspective of the divine; it was quite another to take one's place as a man in the cosmos and wrestle with the implications of human life on a day to day basis. If Jesus' experiences of life on the earth had been always tempered by a unique power due to His deity, then His coming to earth to live among men would have been only a token thing, and of very limited value in providing either example or empathy for our human condition. Jesus was a stable person, and not given to emotionalism, but He did drink to the full the cup of human sorrow and "tasted death for every man;" not only at the cross, but in the daily struggles of life. In Hebrews 2:10, we read, **"For it was right for Him, on account of whom are all things and through whom are all things, to bring to fulfillment the author and captain of their salvation through sufferings."** (Authors translation). Thus, it was necessary for Jesus to participate fully with human beings in their suffering, if He was to be a proper high priest in the matters of their salvation.

So Jesus joined the steady stream of God's prophets and messengers through the ages in the matter of the struggle with this life.

Satan could never let such messengers rest. He must incessantly attack the stream of revelation from God to man. Invariably God's prophets led hard and often tormented lives. They were examples to the world of the bitter struggle between God and Satan. It would be very instructive for the reader to follow the lives of these prophets throughout the Old Testament—Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, for example. As far as the flesh is concerned, their lives were a constant torment. Jesus did not escape this, nor did His disciples after Him. Witness the lives, for example, of Peter and Paul. These men had nothing but heartache and bitter struggle all of their days on the earth. But, they were men of the Word and prayer. Every stroke of the sword was a blow against Satan and his kingdom. In describing his battle with Satan, Paul says that he was not **"beating the air."** Every blow landed on the enemy. Satan could not possibly let these men rest. As the prophets of old, their lives were a constant witness to the conflict between God and Satan. Those who find life too easy today may not be offering the enemy much of a threat.

But now, in what sense was Jesus troubled? Later on, He will tell His disciples not to be troubled. Is He contradicting Himself? The answer lies in the seat of the turbulence. Here we must call attention again to the difference between "soul" and "spirit." On this present occasion, Jesus said, **"Now My soul is troubled."** In John 14, He says to

the disciples, **“Let not your heart be troubled.”** The soul in the New Testament is the realm of the natural man. It includes the brain and nervous system as physiological instruments, together with the physical attributes of man. The human brain is the seat of the personality. The brain acts as a computer, storing up the data from all the experiences and learning processes of the entire life. These experiences are then used as the basis of all emotion and mental processes. The personality is the life-long accumulation of hereditary traits and conscious experiences integrated and expressed in behavior patterns. This is the realm of the flesh. Not everything of the flesh is wrong. But all that is produced through our fleshly, or human apparatus, is subject to the effects of the Fall. Consequently, the flesh is not to be trusted. Paul makes this quite clear in Philippians 3, when he says, **“Who...have no confidence in the flesh.”** The natural thought processes are the basis of emotions. Jesus had a personality, but it was not affected by the fall. Nevertheless, even though He saw things clearly, as one not affected by sin, He still was subject to natural human emotions. Not being affected by the Fall, His natural emotions did not lead Him into sin as ours sometimes do.

The spirit, on the other hand, is the realm occupied by the Spirit of God. Jesus had a Spirit that was fully possessed with the Spirit of God. It is in the realm of the spirit that death occurred in the Fall. Man no longer was able to identify with God in the spirit. It is that which died within him, according to God’s warning. When one is “born again,” that capacity to possess the Spirit of God is revived, and one becomes the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit then occupies the spirit of every believer, and produces the fruit of the

spirit, as outlined in Galatians 5:22. These graces of the spirit are a natural product of the Spirit of Christ within, and cannot be in any way counterfeited by human religious effort. **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, graciousness, goodness, faith, meekness [openness to God and man], moderation [inner control]...”** (Galatians 5:22 A.T.). These “graces” are certainly limited in the new believer, but they are there as surely as the Holy Spirit is there. It is necessary for these fruits to ripen as the Christian matures. It is most important to understand, however, that these are fruits of the Spirit and not the flesh. The mind cannot actually process these graces because of its fleshly limitations, and so the Holy Spirit must express them through us often apart from any capacity of our own minds to enter into what is taking place. Thus, in terms of peace, for example, many times there is turbulence and unrest in the natural mind, and at the same time there is peace in the spirit. This is the impact of Philippians 4:7, where we are told that the peace of God **“passes all understanding.”** (For a further discussion see Lessons 14 and 34.)

The vital importance of this truth for the discussion of Jesus’ troubled soul, is that there were a great many times when Jesus was troubled by things about Him, but that did not affect His Spirit, nor did it mean that God was any the less vital in His Spirit. All believers on the earth are subject to the same kind of troubling in the flesh, or “soul” over many different kinds of circumstances. But in the midst of this turbulence, there is also a peace within our spirits, which goes beyond our own capacity to either produce or understand. When Jesus said to the disciples, **“Let not your hearts be troubled,”** He was referring to the realm of the spirit. In the Old Testament and in the minds of Jewish

people, the word “heart” was often used to indicate the spirit. When Jesus said also in the 14th chapter, **“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you;”** He then said, **“Not as the world gives, give I unto you.”** He was clearly saying that His kind of peace was not what the world would expect; that is, freedom from trouble or conflict in the mind. He immediately followed this for a second time with the expression, **“Let not your hearts be troubled.”** Believers are not spared from trouble and distress in the flesh. Even Paul expressed this unrest in his flesh. **“For when we had come unto Macedonia our flesh had not any rest, but in all things we were afflicted—without were fightings, within were fears”** (II Corinthians 7:5 A.T.).

The spirit is the citadel of faith and the dwelling place of Christ forever. Outside the fortress, in our flesh, there is a continuous struggle as Satan assaults the citadel. He will never be successful in overcoming the citadel, where Christ dwells, but he often stirs up much trouble for the believers in the battleground of the flesh outside the walls of the fortress. (For a further discussion of this theme, see the author’s pamphlet, *The Struggle*.) Jesus, then, was troubled in His soul, as we are sometimes troubled; but He was strong in spirit, as we may also be strong in spirit. His mind entertained for a moment the possibility of deliverance from the impending ordeal; but it was only for a moment. Immediately, He focused on the meaning of His coming—the salvation of man and the glorifying of God. To Jesus’ request that the Father’s name be glorified there comes a response that splits the heavens like thunder: **“I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”** Among the occasions where the glory of God was manifested was the recent raising of

Lazarus. Soon again will this glory burst upon man in the raising of Jesus Himself.

In His determination to proceed with the sacrifice, Jesus declares as an accomplished fact, the total defeat of the enemy. In the mind of God, the lamb had been **“slain from the foundation of the world”** (Revelation 13:8). God does not reckon things in the space-time continuum as do His creatures. In the mind of God all things are timeless. Satan is already defeated. He has not the slightest chance of victory. It is well for the believer to understand this and to act upon it with the complete confidence that God has all things under His ultimate control. In terms of time, Satan is yet continuing his activities, but in terms of ultimate reality, he functions within a very limited context. That is why the believer does not need to fear him. There is nothing that he can do that is beyond God’s control. Because of this, Jesus could very easily order the raising of Lazarus; and so, of course, could any believer, if God should will it.

The expression **“lifted up”** was apparently understood by the crowd as an indication of His death, because they immediately questioned Him about it. It was their understanding that the Messiah would live forever. Jesus had made claims to Messiahship and now He was telling them that He was going to die. The vital truths about the Messiah seem quite plain to us who have knowledge of both the Old and the New Testaments. It would seem that the Jews, who had the Old Testament, should understand that the Messiah was supposed to be not a conquering hero but the final sacrifice of God. But it must be remembered that these people had been under the teaching of the Pharisees, who based their teaching on the traditions of the elders, and not upon the Old Testament

text as such. To us, after the advent of Christ, passages like Isaiah 53 seem to be quite obvious. But, to the Pharisee of Jesus' time and to the rabbi today, both of whom are subject to the judicial blindness of Israel, the Messianic passages are totally misunderstood by them. Jesus will talk about this shortly.

Jesus, hanging on the cross, released the energy of God which acted as a magnetic force radiating out to all peoples on the earth. As iron is affected by a magnet, so the heart of man is affected by the power of God. The sacrifice of Christ removed the

negative force that hindered man from being drawn to God. However, the blindness of man, such as that which affected Israel, can prevent that force from effectively touching the heart. Jesus appeals to the Jewish people to accept the Light while they have it. He apparently places responsibility for accepting the Light, on the will. On a previous occasion He had said, **"If any man will to do His [God's] will, he shall know of the teaching . . ."** (John 7:17). Removing the barriers belongs to God; stepping into the light belongs to man. **"He that comes to Me, I will in no way cast out"** (John 6:37).

John 12:37-50

TRANSLATION

These things Jesus spoke, and went away and hid Himself from them. But though He had done such miracles before them, they were not believing on Him; in order that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which said, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they were not able to believe, because again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn, and I heal them." These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and spoke concerning Him. But with all of that, many of the chief men believed on Him, but on account of the Pharisees they were not confessing it, lest they be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God.

But Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes on Me is not believing on Me but on the One who sent Me, and he who beholds Me is beholding the One who sent Me. I have come as a Light into the world, in order that everyone who believes on Me may not remain in darkness. And if one hear My words and does not keep them, I am not judging him, for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has that which judges him; the word which I have spoken, that will judge him in the last day; because I have not spoken from Myself, but the Father who has sent Me has Himself given Me commandment as to what I say and what I speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. The things therefore which I am speaking, even as the Father has said to Me, so I speak."

COMMENTARY

Blinded Eyes and Hardened Hearts Resist the Miracles of Jesus

For centuries the religion of God's people had been a barren wasteland dominated by empty forms and rituals that were void of the Spirit of God. God had withdrawn Himself from them according to His word as

a result of the insistence of His people upon following idolatrous practices. By the time Jesus came on the scene, the religious leaders had become so completely encased in the walls of tradition that the greatest of

miracles seemed utterly ineffective in penetrating to their inner spirits. When the children of Israel were about to enter the “Promised Land,” God had warned them repeatedly not to mingle with the original inhabitants of Canaan. In fact He had commanded them to drive the inhabitants out completely. Israel failed to do this, and the result was as God had predicted, that they were swallowed up by the idolatry and satanic practices of that land. God sent a stream of prophets year after year to warn the people and encourage them to repent and recover their devotion to the true God. Not only were these prophets unheeded, but they were treated with contempt and often tormented for their faithfulness in proclaiming God’s message. Finally the hour came when the cup of mercy would be withdrawn and God’s messengers would offer instead the cup of wrath. Blessed is the man that brings the cup of mercy; but woe to him whose lot it is to offer the cup of wrath. Such a “cupbearer” must certainly have a very special touch from God.

Such a messenger was Isaiah. From the very beginning his message had been of wrath and judgment. By all standards it was a rough assignment. The prophets’ lot among the people of God was not an enviable one at best; but for Isaiah, the woes were compounded by the content of his message which was one of wrath and judgment. (He would not have done well among today’s “prophets of prosperity.”) From the beginning of his ministry, it was his unpalatable task to lance the boils of Israel and uncover the putrid sores of their faithless and abominable conduct. For this he would need a veritable flood of divine power working through him. It was not long in coming. In a moment of national and personal crisis, at the death of King Uzziah, God revealed Himself to Isaiah with such power and glory, that it left the prophet

utterly devastated before Him. He had been a prophet of God for some years and had carried a great burden for the people of Israel, but even so at the touch of God, he felt himself to be naught but a wretched sinner. Visions that leave people feeling exhilarated and glorious are suspect. Throughout the Scripture when God has met prophet after prophet in great revelations of Himself, the ultimate effect was desolation and humiliation. Remember, for example, Abraham and Jacob and Moses; Jerimiah, Ezekial and the apostle Paul. The vessel must be shattered before God can really use it. And then He takes a fragment of that vessel and with it dips a bit of refreshing for the people of God. If there is too much left of the vessel it will give too much occasion for pride.

The human terms with which Isaiah describes his experience must surely beggar the reality, but it was all he had. We must trust the Holy Spirit to convey to us the meaning of the vision. (The reader should look now at Isaiah 6, to get the story.) The glory of God filled the temple where He was, and the prophet was left prostrate with grief over his own wretched condition. He had only one prayer left in him, the cry of repentance: **“I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”** God’s response was immediate—the purifying fires of the altar. It has ever been so. The heart that cares is cleansed. God remains in an attitude of forgiveness continually. He awaits only the cry of penitence. People sometimes wonder if God’s forgiving grace has ended as far as they are concerned. The simple answer is that if the heart cares to be forgiven, it is obvious that the spirit is still working. If the Holy Spirit were not present there would be no concern for forgiveness. Cleansed by the fire of the altar and charged with the power of God, Isaiah

never waived until his message was fully delivered to the people of God. A word of caution must here be given. People sometimes use Isaiah as an example of the kind of experience and power that they too may have. That would be a serious misapplication of the text, and has caused a great deal of disappointment and damage in subsequent years as people have sought to have the power of Isaiah without the commission. Remember well that God sought out Isaiah for this vision; Isaiah did not seek it from God. The same was true of all of the experiences of the prophets through the Scriptures including the apostles of the New Testament. When God had a special experience for them, He came to them, in His own time. He met Paul on the Damascus road, for instance, when Paul was not in the least seeking for any change in his religious experience. And the same has been true through the ages. The tendency to seek out special experiences from God is in the first place quite presumptuous, assuming that one is ready for the experience; and is quite perilous in the second place, because it gives opportunity for Satan to come in and counterfeit with some unusual experience that is assumed to be from God because of its miraculous nature. Many a prophet has come to grief, misled by voices that they thought were from God. The message which God gave to Isaiah at that time, was the very words used by Jesus to challenge the Pharisees. In 750 years the sword had not lost its edge and with it Jesus cut the enemy to ribbons.

The heart of Isaiah's message to God's people was that if they did not cease from their idolatry there would come to them a blindness of eyes and hardness of heart that would prevent them from repenting later on. They would lose their touch with God—their spiritual vision of truth and their

openness of heart to the Spirit of God. It is a priceless gift of God—to see the truth. God's people had bartered it cheaply for the worthless tinsel and empty glory of the pagan idolatries. The blindness that happened to Israel was in the first place an administrative thing. That is, it was an act of divine justice and not a personal matter. And, it was not apparently a universal thing; that is, it did not extend to every single Jew, because a large number of Jews were, in fact, able to see the Light and to turn to Jesus as the true Messiah. It is most important to understand that no human being can come to faith apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in opening the mind to the truth. The key seems to be the honest desire to know the truth, and the humility to admit one's need of help. To the Jews, themselves, Jesus had said that anyone who would come to Him, would not be cast out (John 6:37). When the giving of the Word is attended by the Holy Spirit, and the mind of the hearer is open to learn, it is a very easy thing for God to bring about belief. Once again Jesus identified Himself as the Father. **“He who believes on Me is not believing on Me, but on the One who sent Me; and he who beholds Me, is beholding the One who sent Me.”** Acceptance of Jesus meant automatically the acceptance of God the Father, for Jesus was indeed the temporary earthly manifestation of the Father. He wanted them to know that to believe on Him was no violation of the principle of the “one God.” In this respect, He was the very voice of God so that what He was speaking was not spoken as merely a human person on the earth but as the very voice of God to man. Furthermore, He urged them to receive the Light as long as they had it, because one day the darkness would come and there would never again be the opportunity of eternal life. Then there would come, with the darkness, the judgments of God upon

the earth. The message He was bringing to them was a message of love and grace and mercy. He came to them, **“not judging,**

but justifying.” He came not to condemn the world but to save it.

John 13:1-4

TRANSLATION

Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should pass out of this world to the Father; having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto fulfillment [of His purpose for them]. And a supper taking place; the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him; knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands; and that He had come out from God and was going to God, He rose from supper and laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself.

COMMENTARY

As the End Draws Near of Jesus' Earthly Sojourn, the Divine Purpose Moves Steadily Toward Fulfillment

The coming of Jesus to earth had been the masterstroke of God in the grand design of redemption. Jesus, as the living revelation of God and the agent of reconciliation is, if you will, the focal point of the canvas. He came, not merely to offer a way of life, but to be, Himself, "the Way and the Life." To identify with Him would be not merely to follow His teachings, but to be one with Him by means of the life-giving Spirit. And now the masterwork is about to be completed. He has gathered with His disciples for a few fleeting moments before the final agony and triumph. The meaning and purpose of His life remains to Him crystal clear. The love of God, bursting forth in creation and caring, has prevailed through the trying centuries of Israel's faltering faith and idolatry. That love will now carry Jesus to the cross and to the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose for His creation. All creation will now be

restored to the grand design which God had in the beginning when He set in motion the forces of the universe. Throughout the discourses of Jesus during these final hours, there is reflected the indomitable assurance that His work has been successful. In His mind, the enemy has already been vanquished. He must now return to the Father. But what does it mean, "**that He should pass out of this world to the Father?**" Is He not also the Father? In Spirit, yes! The Spirit that possessed the earthly Jesus, was indeed the Spirit of the Father. All of the Spirit of Jesus was filled with God, but there was more to God than Jesus. The expression "Father" refers to the Godhead as that eternal Spirit that was the origin of all things. When Jesus had completed the earthly, revelational phase of the Godhead, He returned to glory; and added to the Godhead a glorified human body, which will

enable man to enter into an eternal, functional relationship with Him. Meanwhile, the Godhead functions at once as the spiritual force behind the universe, and the earthly revelational projection of Himself, called Jesus. (For a further discussion of this matter, the reader is referred to previous sections of the Commentary.)

The occasion of Jesus gathering with His disciples was a supper that had taken place before the Passover. It was not the Passover feast itself. As of this moment, Judas had already been filled with the spirit of betrayal, and Jesus knew it. He also knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, nevertheless, and that whatever Satan would do from this time forth would only serve the divine purpose. Whether before, or during, or after the meal is not altogether certain in the wording of the original Greek text, but at some time during the occasion, Jesus arose, girded Himself with a towel, and began to wash the feet of the disciples. The towel that He used was that which was commonly worn by a servant as an apron. Whatever the full implications of the footwashing episode

were (it will be dealt with in detail in the next lesson), the disciples could hardly have missed the impact of this study in humility. Certainly Peter reflected the startling effect of Jesus' action. Concern about status has always been the mark of the insecure person. So assured was Jesus of the nature of His being and the meaning of His mission that it was nothing to Him to assume the role of servant and wash the disciples' feet. His express statement in Mark 10:45 indicates His attitude: **“The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.”** Jesus' attitude stood in sharp contrast to the disciples who had, even on this very occasion, been disputing with one another over the issue of who should be the greatest. After so much time with Jesus, they still had not grasped the meaning of servitude. Jesus had tried to impress them again and again with the realities of human relationship. He had so recently tried to show them that He who would be the Lord of all, must be the servant of all.

So Jesus, knowing full well who He was and what He was, arose from the table and girded Himself with a towel.

John 13:4-17

TRANSLATION

...[Jesus] arose from supper and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself. Then He put water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. He came then to Simon Peter. He [Peter] said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not know now, but you will know after these things." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered Him, "If I do not wash you, you do not have a part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need but to wash his feet, but is altogether clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." When He had washed their feet then, He took His garments and reclined again, and said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for I am. If then I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that even as I have done to you, you should also do. I tell you the absolute truth, the servant is not greater than his lord, neither is the apostle greater than the One who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

COMMENTARY

In the Final Days Before the Glory—An Example of Genuine Humility

Certain of His own identity; satisfied that all was moving according to plan; and assured of the ultimate success of His mission, Jesus was free to function in an act of genuine humility uninhibited by doubts and insecurity. He arose from the table with simple resolve, wrapped Himself in a servant's apron-towel, poured water into a basin, and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. The practice was of course a

common custom in the Middle East. Basically it was a practical matter, because of the open sandals that were worn, allowing the feet to become dusty in travel. The host either provided the necessary facilities for his guests, or on some occasions he would actually perform the service. When he did so, it was because he wanted to give special honor to the guest. Otherwise it was quite common for either a

servant to perform the task, or as frequently with Jesus, for one of His disciples to do it. It was therefore quite startling to the disciples, as reflected in Peter's response, that Jesus should do it at this time. That the element of honor was involved was quite obvious from Peter's declaration (which was most emphatic in the Greek text): **"You shall never at any time wash my feet."** To Peter, it was simply not appropriate for the Master to wash the servant's feet.

After Jesus had convinced Peter that it was a necessary fulfillment of their relationship, then he wanted to be washed all over. Jesus' response further indicates the nature of the custom. He reminded him that if one had taken a bath, it was necessary only to wash the feet, since they would have been exposed to the dusty road. (The word that Jesus used for bathing is different than the one that was used for washing the feet). Jesus uses the bathing to symbolize their original identification with Him, and the washing of the feet to the necessity of daily cleansing. Jesus' expression, **"He that has bathed...is altogether clean,"** is an obvious parallel to His expression in Chapter 15: **"You are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you."** The fact that it was a reference to their basic relationship to Him, is evidenced by His exclusion of Judas from this classification.

It is important to remember, again, the distinction between the flesh and the spirit. When the Spirit of Christ comes into our spirits, He comes to take up His abode there—He comes to stay. His remaining with us is not conditional upon our goodness, or deeds, any more than His coming in the first place was based upon our own goodness. If good deeds cannot save us, then the absence of good deeds could not

be the basis of our being lost. To be saved, we must have the presence of Christ in us. To be lost would require dismissing Christ from us permanently. Sensitivity to the problem of the inadequacy of human knowledge forces us to admit that we cannot with absolute certainty declare that a person who has received Christ into their heart could never dismiss Him. However, it can be said with certainty that if one wants Christ to stay, one may be confident that He will. Should the question ever arise as to whether or not Christ has departed from one, one may take comfort from the fact that if there is a care about Christ, it is obvious that His Spirit has not departed. If His Spirit had departed, there would be no further concern about His presence within.

When the Spirit of Christ comes into our spirits, He does not come also to dwell in our flesh. The evidence of this is Paul's statement, **"In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing."** If Christ were present in our flesh, such a statement could not be made. According to Paul (see Romans 7 and Philippians 3), the flesh will be an untrustworthy and troublesome thing all of our life on the earth. The anointing oil of the priest never touched the flesh (see Exodus 30). The symbolism here is quite clear. The presence of the Spirit of Christ in our spirits helps us to cope with the flesh, but does not sanctify the flesh. The flesh sometimes duplicates the work of the spirit, even in religious matters, but can never produce the fruit of the Spirit. Falsehood and facade in religion are the product of the flesh. The symbolism of footwashing points to the possibility that one may have the Spirit of Christ within eternally, and yet offend the Lord and others daily and therefore need daily cleansing.

In Jesus' statements He clearly takes a common custom and brings to it a divine

symbolism. In like manner, the common custom of greeting with a kiss, was given a sanctified note in the expression, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In Europe, the kiss is still a common form of greeting. In other parts of the world, the kiss is reserved for special relationships. In America, for example, the handshake is the more common form of greeting. In Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians to "**greet the brethren with a holy kiss,**" it would be a misapplication of the text to insist that whatever the custom in whatever country, the kiss was the specific form of greeting recommended for Christians. Paul was merely urging a very warm greeting to the fellow believers, with the added emphasis of the sacredness of their relationship. He was not in any way instituting here a ritual greeting to be universally adopted. To use here the word "hand-shake" in place of kiss, does not correct the situation at all. It only replaces one localized custom for another. The heart of the matter must be seen as the urging of an expression of genuine Christian caring, whatever the customary greeting might be.

There is a parallel here in this matter of footwashing. Jesus was using a common custom to convey a very special symbolism. He was not necessarily instituting a new ritual. Even though the time factor may be unusual, since the episode took place either after, or during the course of the meal rather than before the meal as would be the common practice, still it was a custom with which the disciples would be very well familiar. The disciples had in fact neglected this customary procedure before the meal, and Jesus was making a point of their neglect. Perhaps they were too busy debating over who should be the greatest, to be bothered with this most gracious expression of caring. It should be observed here that in the case of the instituting of

the so-called "Lord's Supper," Jesus was introducing something quite different. He was introducing something quite new to them. And here did urge them to continue the practice until He would come again.

In the matter of the footwashing, Jesus was urging the disciples to forget about the issue of honor and turn instead to the implications of humility and servitude. As Jesus used it, the footwashing was at once a symbol of caring and a symbol of cleansing. In the continued practice of the custom, He wanted them to find new meaning. In the same way, the presence of Christ within our hearts brings new meaning to the contemporary customs of our own. The handshake can convey the touch and caring of Christ from the heart of one believer to another. The embrace can have a most sacred significance. (A note of warning should be sounded here, however. It is so easy for the flesh to creep in, that we must be very careful about the use of expressions of affection. Much that goes today in the name of Christian love is merely fleshly affection and has nothing to do with the spirit of caring.)

While we do not have today a universal custom that conveys the idea of cleansing, all acts of genuine Christian love can in themselves convey an attitude of openness and forgiveness to our fellow believer. Jesus was not, of course, focusing so much on the action as on the attitude. The problem with making a religious ritual of this is that it all too easily relegates the matter to a periodic ceremony, and takes the emphasis off of the deed of a daily ministry to one another. The spirit of this matter is so aptly expressed in Ephesians 4:32: "**And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**" Leaving this to a periodic ritual, is much the same as leaving

our attentions to another until appropriate holidays.

There are some groups today that believe quite sincerely and wholeheartedly that footwashing was instituted as a required ritual, in the same way that our Lord instituted communion. There is surely nothing wrong with the practice. It can be a most blessed experience. Nothing said so far would discourage the practice. To insist upon it, however, as an essential requirement, would go beyond the clear teaching of the text. If Jesus had intended this to be a universal mandate, as in the case of baptism, then a very large part of Christendom would, today, be disobedient to it. Over the centuries of the Church, the Holy Spirit has been most faithful in bringing conviction to the hearts of His people in matters where they were not

fulfilling His purposes for them. There have been a great many men of God through the centuries of the Church, whose ministry has been ritually blessed of the Spirit, and yet who have not felt convicted of this matter. It is a very risky thing to insist upon specialization. Where the work of the Spirit has been manifest in the lives of believers, apart from these specializations, it is wise to be moderate in our insistence upon them. If on the other hand, there are those who derive blessings from certain practices, it is well for the rest of the believers to be at peace with them.

In a final statement, it is well to remember that Christ was concerned about the spirit and not about laws and rituals. The attitudes of the spirit must never be obscured by a focus upon rules or rituals.

John 13:18-30

TRANSLATION

“I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’ I am speaking to you from this point, before it has taken place, in order that when it has taken place you may believe that I am He. I tell you the absolute truth, he who receives the One whom I have sent receives Me. He who receives Me receives the One who sent Me.” When He had said these things, Jesus was troubled in His Spirit, and gave witness and said, “I tell you the absolute truth that one of you will betray Me.” The disciples looked at one another, being troubled concerning whom He was speaking about. There was reclining in the bosom of Jesus one of His disciples whom Jesus loved; Simon Peter was motioning to this one to inquire who it was that He was speaking about. That one, reclining thus upon the bosom of Jesus, said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “That one is he to whom I will dip the morsel and give it to him.” He then dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. And after the morsel, then Satan entered into that one. Jesus then said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” And in this matter no one of those who were reclining knew what He said to him. For certain were thinking, since Judas had the moneybag, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we need for the feast, or to give to the poor.” That one then took the morsel and went out immediately; and it was night.

COMMENTARY

Of Human Betrayal and Satanic Power

That a disciple of Jesus, who was also His friend, could deny Him under the pressures of the Roman court is wretched, but not altogether unthinkable, given the weakness of the human nature. That one who had accompanied with Jesus for several years would not only deny Him but also sell himself out to the devil and betray his Master to the hands of butchers, is quite

beyond all our understanding. It is more puzzling yet that Jesus should have known all along that Judas would betray Him; and yet, had chosen him to be one of the twelve. The measure of Jesus is shown, not only in that He had resolutely accepted the divine purpose in the matter, but also was able to so relate to Judas that the rest of the disciples did not have the slightest idea

about this even after Jesus gave the clues at the moment just preceding the actual carrying out of the deed.

Very little is known about Judas Iscariot. Even the meaning of the name is uncertain. There has been a good deal of speculation about him and his name, but it is always unprofitable, if not risky, to enter into speculation. Had it been important to the issue, the Holy Spirit would certainly have given us more information about him in the Scripture. The most important single item about Judas is that he was called **“the son of destruction (perdition),”** in John 17:12. The same name was applied to the Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2:3. Again in Revelation 9:11, the name is given to the king over the fearsome beasts of destruction, who is also the messenger, or angel, of the abyss (bottomless pit). The name *“Apollyon,”* which is used here is from the same root as the word “destruction” used in John 17 and II Thessalonians 2. So possessed of Satan were these figures that they could almost be considered an extension of him. Whereas in the beginning, Judas was much affected by, if not altogether controlled by Satan, there came that awful moment as recorded here in John 13, when Satan actually entered into Judas and he went out to do his infamous deed.

There is much speculation as to the motivation behind Judas’ act of betrayal. But again, it is unprofitable and risky. The mind is rarely capable of accounting for its deeds. That is why even in acts of Christian love and devotion our dependence must be upon the ministry of the spirit within us rather than upon the capacity of the human mind to understand and initiate divine things. When the Spirit of God possesses our spirits He brings His love and joy and peace beyond our understanding. But on

the other hand, when the spirit of Satan possesses a human being, it is obvious that ideas and deeds are perpetrated by that human being that go beyond his own control. Since Jesus, Himself, identified the point at which Satan actually entered Judas, we may reasonably assume that prior to that time he was affected by Satan but not fully possessed by him. But, so completely had he given himself over to Satan’s control that even prior to the betrayal, he could be readily classified as “thief.” Whatever the elements of the betrayal may be, one thing is certain—Satan got to Judas and used him as an instrument of destruction.

Perhaps the most important question raised by the whole matter of Judas’ betrayal is the degree to which Judas was predestined to this purpose. The question is crucial because it raises the issue of freedom of the will. To what extent is the human being really free to make his own choices? When one reads the Bible without the confusing inferences and suppositions of the theologians, he finds the following ideas to be quite evident in all the narrative from Genesis to Revelation:

1. God does have a redemptive purpose for His people, Israel; which has not ever been, nor ever will be, thwarted by any human action.
2. God uses nations and kings; and people; and animals; and the forces of nature to carry out His purposes.
3. He never takes people whose hearts are open to Him and changes them, for His own purposes, to be against Him.
4. He often used people, especially kings and nations who were already against Him; and hardened or fixed their hearts to carry out His purposes, even when those purposes

meant their own destruction (as in the case of Pharaoh).

5. God made administrative judgments that related to His eternal purposes, but did not necessarily affect an individual relationship to Himself (as for example in the case of Esau, who did not have to reject God personally).
6. God made such an administrative judgment in the case of the hardening of Israel as a result of their idolatry, but left the individual free to pursue their own faith privately.
7. God always held people accountable for their choices and disciplined them when they made the wrong ones (as for example when Moses in his anger disobeyed God and lost the right to enter the Promised Land).
8. For those who were open to God, the freedom to make the right choice was always evident throughout the Scripture.
9. Jesus was very explicit in His statement about this in John 7:17, **“If anyone will to do His will, he shall know concerning the teaching whether it is of God or I speak from Myself”** (A.T.).
10. It is not in keeping with the Spirit of the Scripture, or the nature of God to exclude any willing heart from following Him.

The idea that anyone should be predestined to be lost is based upon theological systems of human logic, and not upon any significant statements in the Scripture. So-called “proof-texts” are a very risky basis for issues as crucial as this one. It should also be noted that human logic does not always conform to divine logic.

Now, as far as Judas is concerned, there is no statement anywhere in the Scripture that indicates that Judas was born for this task. The fact that Judas was called the “son of perdition,” does not any more imply that he was this from birth than does the expression “child of God” imply that a Christian was so from birth. The fact that Jesus knew ahead of time that Judas was going to betray Him did not in any way force Judas to do it. Throughout the centuries, Satan himself has made use of human beings, such as psychics, or spiritists, to predict events, and thus to deceive the unwary. The fact that Satan has been able to guide them in the predicting of events does not mean that Satan himself determined those events. It is true that God has predetermined many events, but that does not mean that He predetermines the individuals who shall carry out the events.

Jesus, Himself, identifies the moment that Satan entered into Judas. Had Judas been born to the task of betrayal, Satan would have been in him from the beginning. This is not to say that Judas was ever “born again,” or that he ever had any personal identification with God. There was very likely a progression of attitudes and actions on Judas’ part that brought him to that fateful day. Who can say whether or not Judas would ever have come to a relationship to God? However, it must be concluded that the choice was Judas’ own choice, and that he was not merely an unwilling pawn in a great chess game. To accuse God of such action is to deny the very essence of His nature of love. Peter (who ought to know) tells us in his Epistle that God is **“...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (II Peter 3:9).

The matter of one’s eternal relationship to God is of crucial importance. It cannot be

carelessly handled. The Bible is filled with warnings from Genesis to Revelation about the power of Satan to deceive and to destroy. He is not to be trifled with. People who make careless statements about what Satan can and cannot do ought to be extremely cautious, lest they deceive themselves and others and become victims of Satan's many clever snares. Paul makes a very serious statement to Timothy regarding certain ones (presumably Christians), **"...that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will"** (II Timothy 2:26).

It is not likely that Judas joined with Jesus with the express intention of betraying Him. No doubt Satan used a series of attitudes and events to finally ensnare him. No one ever intends to be ensnared by Satan. It is not possible to determine what the specific events were, but certainly an attitude of materialism and pride were quite evident wherever his name came up.

The great lesson to be learned from the Judas' narrative by way of practical knowledge is that **SATAN IS A FORMIDABLE FORCE IN THE WORLD; HE CAN ONLY BE RESISTED BY THE POWER OF GOD.**

The surest way for one to protect himself from Satan is the following:

1. Be sure you have asked the Spirit of Christ to come into your spirit.
2. Nourish your spirit on the Word of God.
3. Seek out the fellowship of believers.
4. Avoid unnecessary association with unbelievers who, no matter how good or harmless they may seem, are nevertheless, knowingly or unknowingly, agents of Satan.
5. Be in daily communion with Christ, accounting your relationship to Him of greater importance than anything else on the earth.

John 13:31-38

TRANSLATION

When he had gone out then, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him; if God has been glorified in Him, God also shall glorify Him in Himself, and He shall glorify Him soon. Little children, I am with you for yet a little while; you shall seek Me, and even as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I go you are not able to come,’ I also say to you now. A new commandment I am giving to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you that you also love one another. In this way all shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I go you are not able to follow Me now, but you will follow Me later.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why am I not able to follow You now; I will lay down my life for You.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? I tell you the absolute truth, the cock shall not crow until you have denied me three times.”

COMMENTARY

The Stage is Set for the Final Glorification—a New Commandment and an Old Weakness

In the mind of Jesus the betrayal was now an accomplished fact, and so, in a way, the final glorification. Jesus, the Son of Man, is glorified in God, and God is glorified in Him. The unity is complete. All that Jesus, the Incarnate God, was to accomplish on the earth, has been accomplished. Now Jesus will return to the former glory to be eternally an integral part of the Godhead from which He had originally come. But what does it mean—“**to glorify?**” The concept of the “**glory of God**” is first introduced in the Old Testament. We must look to it for our basic understanding. The writers of the New Testament had to take

Greek words to translate the old Hebrew concept. As in any language, exact equivalence is difficult. The Hebrew word is “*kabod*.” The basic meaning of the word is “weight” or “heaviness”. It conveys the idea of substance. Applied to objects it would probably indicate genuineness, which is usually weightier; as opposed to the artificial, which is usually lighter (as, for example, in jewelry). The common application with reference to kings denotes substance in the sense of vast possessions and holdings. Thus, glory, as applied to God, denotes His vast substance, not only in terms of material things (for He is possessor

of heaven and earth) but more particularly in terms of the ultimate substance of His being. He is the substantial basis of the entire universe. So, for Jesus to be glorified means for Him to come into the fulfillment of all that was intended by His revelation to man and His identification with God. Jesus called Himself, “**the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**” As the Truth, He is the heart of reality. He is the most substantial element in the entire universe. To one who is looking for an anchor—for a firm footing in a transient world—Christ is the eternal substance in which one may find security throughout eternity. In addition to the idea of weight, glory carries with it a sense of splendor. Hence the Greek term, “*doxa*”, from “*dokeo*”, has a basic meaning of appearance, or that which seems to be. In the grand sweep of divine splendor, there is no facade or illusion. God has the substance to be all that He appears to be. And all that God has promised to man, and all that He has covenanted to do in bringing man to glorification will surely be fulfilled. The glory of this world is illusory, but the glory of God is all that it promises to be, and more—beyond all that our human minds can imagine.

Soon Jesus would enter into His own glory; and leave to a handful of disciples the immense task of communicating to the world the revelation of God which they had themselves experienced in their years with Jesus. They would not, of course, be the authors of the message, but rather the channels through whom the message would be given to mankind. For this awesome assignment, they would need a very special quality—the love of God. Throughout the Law of God as given by Moses, there was the implication of caring—for God, for one’s neighbors. But, the “Decalogue” did not include a commandment to love. Jesus, in His teachings, went to the heart of the Law

and lifted out its most essential ingredient, which was love or *caring*. When the lawyer asked Him what was the greatest commandment of all, He responded, “**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself**” (Luke 10:27). This, He taught, was the basis of all the Law and the prophets.

Now, to His disciples, Jesus puts this in the form of a new commandment. The question, of course, is who can love like this? The answer is, apart from Christ, no one. But, if Christ is in us, we all can. When the Spirit of Christ comes into our hearts He brings with Him all the love of God. Love is a fruit of the spirit, as Galatians 5:22 clearly points out. The problem is not one of possession, but expression. We do possess the love of God within us, but expressing that love through our limited human instruments is difficult. If we did not have the love of God in us, we would not be saved. This is clearly taught in I John 4. Here again there is the need of understanding the difference between the flesh and the spirit. The very attributes of God are in us in the presence of His Holy Spirit. But, we have difficulty expressing that love to others. Part of the problem is that we try to understand the love of God, and then express it in the flesh. There is no way for our human minds to fully understand this love. The brain is an incredible filing system of all the data that we have accumulated by our experiences as well as the hereditary patterns of our lives. We have so many gaps in our knowledge and so many misconceptions and prejudices, that it is difficult for us to actually come up with a valid application of the true love of God. That is why we cannot depend on the flesh for the expression of this love.

Paul understood this when he indicated that he no longer related to people in the flesh, but rather in the spirit. **“So that from now on we no longer know anyone after the flesh”** (II Corinthians 5:16 A.T.). He did not even know Christ after the flesh any longer, but rather after the spirit. In the flesh, his knowledge of Christ had been totally misconceived. The love and knowledge of God is so far beyond the human capacity that we must rather depend upon the Spirit of God within us to express that love than to try to understand it and practice it with our human faculties. In a practical sense, this means that our task is merely to relate to others; God’s task is to touch them through us. In the flesh we try to understand people and to establish principles or rules of conduct in relating to them, but the problem is that everyone is different. The psychologist may analyze human nature generally and make suggestions about relating to others, but in the last analysis no rule really applies to everyone, except the law of love which the Bible freely gives us. Rather than spending a good deal of time reading psychology books and manuals on how to get along with people, one would do well to read the Bible and follow God’s rules for getting along with others. Jesus expresses the most fundamental rule in His commandment to love one another. If the believer will simply reach out to others in kindness and unselfishness, the Holy Spirit within will take care of the intricacies of handling that personality. No matter what problems we may be facing within, there is no reason for our not being kind to others without. That is not hypocrisy. It is rather not forcing others to be the victims of our own inner struggles.

It is absurd to think that we all must be specialists in human behavior. In fact, unfortunately, even the specialists miss the

point in that there is a tendency to generalize human emotions and behavior and make too broad an application. Everyone is different. For example, everyone has a different biochemical pattern. That is, the chemicals of the body have different levels in different individuals. That one factor alone would be enough to make it impossible to apply general theories of behavior to every individual. The failure of the psychiatric profession to handle the behavior problems of individuals, working apart from the Spirit of Christ, is abundantly evident from the universal use of drug and shock therapy as the only alternative. The side effects of this kind of therapy have been so disintegrative, that even the profession itself is today beginning to ask some crucial questions about it. These statements have been made not so much in criticism of the profession, as in illustrating the problem of human beings attempting to get along with each other in our modern world. The only reasonable solution to human relationships is that one follow the Biblical guide in living together under the law of love. But even the law of love cannot be applied by human effort. Our only hope is to let the Spirit of Christ relate to others through us. Kindness and unselfishness are far greater instruments for the unraveling of personality tangles than all the psychological gimmicks put together.

It must be observed here that the love Jesus is talking about is the love of *caring*. There is a difference in the Greek words used throughout the New Testament between affection or liking, and *caring*. When we are asked to love our enemies, we are not being asked to either like them, or condone their deeds, but rather to care about them as human beings. This brings Jesus’ commandment to well within the range of possibility, especially in view of the fact

that God's love is expressed through us. (For a further discussion of this subject, see the comments on John 3:16, in the Commentary.) Jesus urged the disciples to love as He loved. God loved us—not with the permissive indulgence of sentimentality, but with the sacrificial caring of responsibility for our deliverance.

Almost immediately after Jesus had urged upon the disciples the law of love, we are confronted with an example of the inadequacy of the human capacity to fulfill this divine injunction. Peter inquired of Jesus where He was going. Jesus replied

that He was going where the disciples would not be able to follow Him. Peter, responding in the flesh, as usual, replied that not only would he follow Jesus wherever He went, but that he would lay down his life for Him. Without bitterness or anger, Jesus quietly responded, **“Would you lay down your life for me? I tell you the absolute truth, the cock will not crow until you have denied Me three times.”** Human vows are always risky and often presumptuous. The expectations of God are totally beyond the capacity of fallen man.

John 14:1-11

TRANSLATION

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; and if not, I would have told you; because 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. And you know the way where I go.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how do we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you know Him and you have seen Him.” Phillip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time and you have not known Me, Phillip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, how do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ You believe, do you not, that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words which I am speaking to you I do not speak from Myself; but of the Father who dwells in Me; He, Himself, does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; if not, believe on account of the works themselves.”

COMMENTARY

“Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled”

Jesus had been on the earth now for over thirty years. He found it a place of anguish and tears. He was “. . . a **man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.**” But in His sorrow He wept not for Himself, but for the wretchedness of humanity about Him. Jesus had Himself mastered the meaning of life. He demanded of it little, and was not disappointed. He did not come to make a good life for Himself, but to spend Himself for others. The message of “positive thinking” would not have impressed Him. (The message of “positive thinking” is more

readily adaptable to circles of the self-oriented, where success is measured by circumstance, and the process of spiritual growth through affliction is handily bartered for fleshly expansion through acquisition.) Life had not been good for Jesus. He had been misunderstood by friend and foe; family and Pharisee. He had been persecuted and pursued by Jew and Gentile; king and commoner. He had no place on earth to lay His head, and, even in death, was placed in a borrowed tomb.

Jesus' exhortation, "**Let not your heart be troubled,**" was based, not on the "magic kingdom" fantasy that He would solve every problem for them, but rather on the imperishable reality of the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit, giving them the capacity to cope with life as it is. Peace that is based on the power of Jesus to solve problems is, for all its religious facade, nevertheless a peace based on circumstances. It is a fleshly kind of peace. Jesus wants to give us the peace that "passes understanding." He wants to give us the kind of peace that is beyond circumstances, and is not subject to the limited capacities of the mind to sustain feelings of confidence.

In order to understand this kind of peace, it is again necessary to understand the difference between flesh and spirit. When the Spirit of Christ comes into our spirit, He brings with Him His own peace. "He is our peace." But this is a peace that is a fruit of the spirit, and not subject to the changing and undependable attitudes of the human thought process, which is part of our flesh. In other words, when the Spirit of Christ is in our spirits, we have a kind of peace that is unaffected by the changing processes of the human life. God gives peace when there is no reason for peace, just as He gives forgiveness when there is no reason to forgive. It is not beyond the human capacity to forgive if there is ample reason; as for example, when the offense is totally unintentional. Similarly, it is not beyond the human capacity to have peace when the reasons are adequate; as for example, when there are human resources to draw upon. The "**peace that passes understanding,**" is the peace of Christ within our spirits that remains steadfast in spite of all human conditions to the contrary, and in spite of the inability of the human mind to produce feelings of peace. We must come to

understand that all human feelings are illusory and not to be trusted. It is not to say that feelings are wrong but rather that they are to be kept in the proper perspective; and that there is a level of sensitivity in the spirit that is beyond feeling and that is as constant as Christ. We must learn to go on in the face of all circumstance and sentiment, and trust in Christ who is our peace.

Jesus' words—"**Let not your heart be troubled**"—are marvelous words. They seem, however, to be beyond the reach of many. If we understand the nature of peace within the spirit, then we can readily appropriate the words to ourselves. The unrest many Christians experience is based upon the fleshly circumstances that they have allowed themselves to get into. Throughout the Scriptures, the believer is warned against involvements and accumulations that belong to this world. The degree to which one has this peace, will be measured by the degree to which one clings to the things of this world. It is quite possible for one to have the peace of Christ in the spirit, but to be involved in this world in such a way that unrest in the flesh is inevitable. Even Paul experienced such times when circumstances left him in unrest in the flesh. "**For when we had come unto Macadonia we had not any rest in our flesh, but in all things were afflicted; without were fightings, within were fears**" (II Corinthians 7:5,6 A.T.). Was Paul denying peace in his spirit? No, by no means. He was merely acknowledging that the flesh often faces conflicts which bring about unrest in the fleshly sense. Jesus, Himself, confessed that He was troubled, at the time of His discussion with the Greeks (see John 12). As long as we are in this world, we will be confronted with troublesome things in the flesh—with "**messengers of Satan,**" as

Paul refers to them. It should not be a cause for alarm, or for discouragement with our spiritual condition. The peace of Christ is

steadfast within, in spite of the conflicts and chaos of the flesh without.

John 14:1-11 (continued)

Jesus, The Eternal Dwelling Place

God had lived on the earth, in the person of Jesus, for over thirty years. He had lived in very close fellowship with His disciples for several years. God, who was the ultimate authority on the meaning of biological life, and eternal life, had now experienced the meaning of community life; that is, life in close contact with human beings at the level of daily routine living. He became personally familiar with the space-time prison in which His creatures were obliged to live out all the days of their lives. When Jesus then speaks of the *monai* (dwelling places), He is fully aware of the implications of that word.

From the very beginnings of Jesus' ministry on the earth, He was constantly warning against focusing on the world of the flesh. As it was the primary purpose of redemption to recover man from the dominion of Satan under which he had come since his disobedience, and to restore him to that condition of spiritual life which he had lost in the Fall, so it was the purpose of Jesus' teaching to redirect man's thinking from the fleshly to the spiritual implications of his new life. He taught that the desires of the flesh, which were rooted in the fallen nature, were continually at odds with the interests of the spirit; and that they needed to be kept under control. He never taught that one should eliminate all of the interests of the flesh, but rather maintain a proper perspective in dealing with these desires. He taught that one ought to seek the Kingdom of God first, and

let all other elements of life be subservient to it. Now then, if the reward for such self-discipline and control of fleshly desires would be the abundant provision of these same material things in Heaven, then we would be involved in a very basic inconsistency.

Accordingly, to translate *monai* as "mansions" (KJV), is to focus on something that would be enticing only to the fleshly ambitions of this world. Perhaps the word "mansions" as used by the translators of the King James Version was more akin in their minds to the word "manse" which was applied to the residence of the local clergyman. Both words do come from the common Greek root word which means "to dwell." Unfortunately, the word "mansion" caught the imagination of some writers and sermonizers alike; and, to this very day, we are saddled with a concept of Heaven that focuses more on the material aspects of Heaven than the spiritual.

It must be clearly understood, however, that the de-emphasizing of the material aspects of Heaven is not, by any means, to be taken as a denial of the continuing realities of the natural man as originally created by God. Jesus, in fact, makes it very clear in His appearance to the disciples after His resurrection, that He did, in fact, possess a body of flesh and bone (although not of blood). We will not be floating about the stratosphere as disembodied spirits; nor is it to deny the magnificence of our eternal

home. It must be realized, however, that this magnificence is centered in the Son of God, whose glory will replace the sun and radiate from His throne in eternal brilliance.

Sadly enough, one sometimes gets the impression that the prevailing anticipation regarding Heaven among Christians today, is more in terms of the material magnificence and freedom from trouble, than for the desire to be with Christ in personal presence under whatever circumstances that may take place.

The marvelous truth is that we may enjoy the presence of Christ on the earth right now. The tendency to focus on the future may in fact put one in the category of the bride who, upon being carried across the threshold of the home of her newly acquired groom may find it unappealing and fix her attention upon promises of future betterment to such a degree that she fails to enjoy the blessings of life with her husband in the immediate present. Often, people who have had to struggle in their early years of marriage will look back upon those years as the most precious of their lives. (It is possible to begin marriage with too much). It is also true of the battlefield. Men often develop a close *camaraderie* in the midst of battle that is never quite possible under the normal conditions of human relationship. One thing is certain—when the final curtain comes down on this earthly age, and we begin our life with Christ in eternal glory, we will never again have the opportunity of knowing Him in the deep *camaraderie* of the battlefield. People who come to Christ at the very end of their lives suffer a great loss in never having the priceless opportunity of knowing Christ on the battlefield, or in the furnace of affliction. It is this which gives true substance to Jesus' words, **“Let not your**

heart be troubled.” It is not so much a matter of Jesus sweeping away all of our problems for us so that we can be free from trouble but rather the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit giving us the capacity to cope with life as it is; or rather, with the lot that He has chosen to give us.

The word *monai*, “dwelling places”, is the same one used in 14:23, where Jesus says that He and the Father will come to us and make their dwelling place with us. There is obviously, then, a dual meaning. While it is no doubt true that there will be very suitable, and probably magnificent, places for us to live in Heaven, the deeper truth is that when we come to Christ we are to a large degree released from the prisonhouse of the space-time world, and may find our greater reality in the identification with God, in whose bosom the universe rests. Here then is truth that can stabilize for us our transient existence on this earth. Jesus has said, **“...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:20). How much richer we will be, if we have learned to appreciate the presence of Christ with us on the earth!

“I am going to prepare a place for you.” Everyone who has received Christ has forever, a place. There are many sad and lonely hearts in the world today who have no place to go and no one to care. For the believer this will never again be true. In Psalm 1, the ultimate end of the righteous man is compared with that of the ungodly. **“For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: the way of the ungodly shall perish.”** [Hebrew: shall be lost.]

The dwelling place of the believer is with God forever, God is home to him—body, soul, and spirit. What greater security does anyone need?

John 14:1-11 (continued)

Jesus—The Key to All That Is Real, Both Now and Forever

The world into which Jesus came was, by all human standards, a brilliant one. Along with the great empire builders, there were also the creative geniuses in the arts and literature; in architecture and mathematics; in philosophy and, to a remarkable degree, in the sciences. Several hundreds of years earlier, the in-depth search for the meaning of man had been led by that noble trio of philosophers—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. With the Greek language at their command, they had reached deeply into the structure of the human mind and society to discover its roots and implications. To the present time, the search has continued with increasing intensity. Unfortunately, there has seemed to be an inverse ratio of knowledge to understanding. As knowledge increases, it seems that the riddles of the universe multiply rather than diminish.

It was an opportune moment for Jesus to enter the world as the living revelation of its Creator and Master. He came with the startling announcement that He was not only the way to life, but life itself; and He was not only the purveyor of truth but He was the very essence of truth. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”** The incessant search by man for meaning to life ends with Jesus, as it begins with the first moments of self-awareness. How is it that Jesus can make such claims for Himself?

In the first place, it must be realized that Jesus is not merely a product of God, He is the very projection of God in human form.

This is where He leaves behind the self-styled prophets of the millennia of human history. Those who have risen to lead mankind in the matters of religion—from the earliest shamans of primitive tribes through the complex presentations of such ones as Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Mohammed, and scores of lesser lights—all share one thing in common; they are mere mortals, reaching out to know the riddle of the universe and pressing their speculations upon any who dares to risk his soul on the tottering foundations of human imagination. While many religious leaders have made moderate claims to divinity, none has so sweepingly identified himself with the one God, the Author of the universe. Jesus’ offer to mankind was not merely to give religious information or guidance, but to be the very essence of life itself.

When we take the Spirit of Christ into our spirits, we become at once one with the Father of the universe. We are not absorbed into Him so as to lose our identity, or to render Him indistinguishable from mankind. He will always be wholly other. There is however, a spiritual unity that establishes a continuous flow of energy through us by His indwelling presence. That energy enables us to function in faith; in communicating with Him and in carrying out His will for our lives. In that sense, we do not need to “go to God.” Rather, He takes up His dwelling within us, as John will point out to us later in this chapter.

Thus, Jesus does not just show us the way; He *is* the way. His statement to the disciples was looking ahead to the time that He would rise from the dead and return to Heaven, and then send to us His Holy Spirit to dwell within. Salvation then is not a matter of finding the way to God; it is rather taking the Spirit of Christ into our spirits.

Similarly, truth is not a matter of factual knowledge, but an absolute reality. The Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, means that which is genuine or real. To speak the truth, then, is to “verbalize reality.” When Jesus said, “I am the truth,” He was identifying Himself as the essence of all that is real in the universe. There is no reality apart from Jesus, since there is no reality apart from God. When we take the Spirit of Christ into our spirits, we are as much a part of reality as God Himself.

Jesus also said, “I am the life.” He is not merely the creator of life, He is the energizing source of life. Colossians 1:16 tells us that all things were created by Christ. Christ is the eternal Logos. He was the living revelation of God to man. As

Christ, however, He was Spirit, and not flesh and blood. Jesus was the flesh and blood incarnation of Christ, the Logos. When Jesus died and rose again, the incarnate body of Jesus was forever identified with Christ the Logos. That is why we speak today of Jesus Christ. To refer to Christ only with the name Jesus, is somewhat like referring to the queen of England as Princess Elizabeth.

Not only was Christ the Creator of life, but according to Colossians 1:17, “**All things stand together in Him**” (A.T.). The King James translation uses the word “consist.” This word comes from the Latin which also means to “stand together.” The basic building blocks of the universe, at least as we so find it, are the atoms. It is not known by science how these atoms manage to hold together. The Bible says that they are held together by Christ. He then is the essential unity of the universe, as well as its creator. Thus Jesus, the incarnation of Christ, can truthfully say “I am the life.” There is no real life apart from Christ. All else is transient and illusory. When we have the life of Christ in our spirit, we are joined to the Author of the universe—we are as abiding as God.

John 14:1-11 (continued)

“He That Hath Seen Me Hath Seen The Father”

The heart of redemption lies in the coming of God to the earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus was not someone whom God had created and then sent as a messenger to the earth. John makes it quite clear that God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, are one. The Spirit of God touched the seed of Mary, and that which was born of her was directly from God. It was not, as in Greek mythology, a divine being experiencing a human moment with a woman of earth. It was, rather, God; projecting Himself through the Holy Spirit in the form of a human life; going through the birth process from embryo to infant; and developing through the stages of human growth from infant to adult—thus, that which was born of the Virgin Mary, was truly God and truly man. The manhood of Jesus was the fleshly cloak of the divine Spirit.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?” There is a oneness here expressed that goes beyond even the mystical unities which the human mind conceives in the relationship between God and man. While Jesus could say, **“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,”** no man could make such a statement.

“The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from Myself but the Father who dwells in Me Himself is doing the works.” When Jesus refers to “the Self,” He is referring, of course, to His human personality. Jesus, as a complete man,

possessed a brain with its nervous system as all human beings do. That brain and nervous system reflected traits of personality as do ours. With His human brain, Jesus had acquired knowledge in the same way that all human beings acquire knowledge. However, the Spirit of God within Him—which was, of course, His own Spirit—was the basic reservoir of the limitless knowledge of God. In human terms, there are things which we sense at the spirit level which go beyond our human minds. This is, of course, a very human analogy, but serves to illustrate that Jesus, possessing the eternal Spirit of God within Him sensed things in that Spirit that were, in reality, the very thoughts of God Himself. Thus, the Spirit of God within Jesus expressed Himself through the human mind of Jesus. The mind of Jesus was an instrument in the process. While His, human mind did not know by itself alone the limitless truths of God, yet that truth—possessed by Jesus in His Spirit—was communicated to the mind; just as those who are today born of the Spirit, or “born again,” find that God has ways of communicating His truths through their spirits beyond their own human capacity to know. Thus Jesus, as far as His human nature was concerned, was quite honest in saying from time to time that He did not know certain things, except as the Father revealed them to Him. The Father, to whom He was referring, of course, was the Spirit within Him.

We must understand that the eternal Godhead is really “Spirit” in essence, and is greater than the entire universe. The Spirit of God not only remains the source of the energy which sustains the universe in continuity, but was also the source through which it was created. The purpose of Jesus was to bring that eternal spiritual presence into a form in which the mind of man could relate to Him.

The word “works” (*erga*), as used in the New Testament, usually refers to more than just certain deeds; it refers more to the active principle behind the deeds. For example, we use the word in connection

with yeast. We say that the yeast “works” in the dough. We mean that the yeast is an active ingredient bringing about a certain result. The Spirit of God within Jesus was the “active ingredient” bringing about the resultant deeds and miracles which Jesus Himself performed. This is not, by any means, to “depersonalize” the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is, of course, the Spirit of God, and is the means through which God extends His power into the universe. In the rest of the fourteenth chapter, John will show very clearly that this same Spirit—the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God—who dwelt in Jesus, also dwells in us.