



St. John's Passion

John chapters 12-21

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60 Eternity Daily Bible Studies

<http://www.aibi.ph/eternity>

Day 1 - John 12:1-8

MARY ANOINTS JESUS

John 12:1-8 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was (who had died, whom He raised from the dead). (2) Then they made a supper here for Him. And Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him. (3) Then Mary took a pound of ointment of pure spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. (4) Then said one of His disciples (Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who was to betray Him) (5) Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? (6) He said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and held the moneybag and carried the things put in. (7) Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for the day of My burial. (8) For you have the poor with you always; but you do not always have Me.

This story connects the grand triumph of chapter 11 and the raising of Lazarus with the cross to come. It is six days before the cross and Lazarus is with Jesus at the table, as well as Judas! Mary anoints and Judas objects. The heart of evil manifests itself in the presence of a resurrected saint and an act of worship. We sense that things have reached a tipping point.

The drama is about to unfold. Bethany – the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus has returned to normal after the death of Lazarus. Martha was still serving, Mary was still worshipping and Lazarus was having fellowship with his Lord. Now we are left wondering where Mary got the spikenard from – it was expensive and they it seems that they were a poor family (there were no servants, Martha did all the work). Perhaps it was given to them when Lazarus died – for his burial but was now being used on Jesus. This was a year's wages for this little family with no savings and Mary poured it all out on Jesus.

Judas reacted to this worshipful extravagance with rage –and seems to have got others to join him (Matthew 26:8) in his indignation over “this waste” (Matthew 26:8). When we pour out our life in Christian service others look on and say “what a waste, a bright young man or woman wasting themselves as a missionary (or pastor)”. Or they might say “Surely you should be a doctor and help more people than the few you are helping now.” People do not understand a life spent on God and for God.

Similarly the line of Judas “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” has been applied to many things that were “extravagances for the Lord” such as cathedrals, stained glass windows, pipe organs and the like. Yet God deserves our extravagance! Money that is truly spent on God is not wasted, but money spent on our egos is. So if the church building is truly “for God” then it should be the very best, but if it is to glorify man and pander to pride, then it should not be constructed.

It was this waste of money that caused Judas to storm out and betray Christ to the Jews.

But underneath the anger was avarice. Judas was a thief, the first pilfering church treasurer. According to statistics put out by the US Center For World Missions approximately 18 billion dollars a year or more is taken from church coffers by “ecclesiastical crime” this is greater than the 17 billion spent on the entire world missions’ budget!

"And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." Grace fills the house. Sometimes people who have been miraculously healed say they smelled " a strong fragrance of roses" in the room at the time. God is fragrant and beautiful and complex and wonderful.

Jesus defends the fragrant act of worship: "Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for the day of My burial. (8) For you have the poor with you always; but you do not always have Me." Jesus understands the heart of devotion and how often the pragmatists of this world attack it. Jesus points out that there are higher priorities than the ever-present social ills. There will always be sick people and poor people and sad people and needy people. But there will not always be Christ in our midst and when He turns up- that becomes the highest priority. Thus if there is a special work of God, a revival, a sudden awareness of His presence, that will be there a while, then be gone – we must seize the day, and leave other pressing duties aside.

The business mindset is of limited use in ministry. Yes it is good to be organized and disciplined, but too much pragmatism and focus on money and results can kill the heart of worship and stifle the aroma of fragrant grace. It can even lead us to betray Christ for gain.

There are those who have a deep heart for worship and will spend many hours making an elegant tapestry for the church. There are those who bring beauty into our midst and are the "incense-makers". These are precious saints and need to be encouraged and defended – not seen as impractical.

Note that in John's and Luke's account the perfume was poured out on Jesus' feet – on the lowest part of His body. In Matthew and Mark it is His head – anointing for Kingship. Probably she anointed His head then went down and poured the remainder over His feet – a pound of ointment goes a long way! Then in an utter act of devotion she washes His feet with her hair!

This would have been so counter-cultural, so shocking; so appalling the room would have gasped. It didn't make economic sense, and it wasn't culturally appropriate but it was an act of love and worship that Jesus wanted us all to know about and appreciate which is why He said:

Matthew 26:13 Truly I say to you, Wherever this gospel shall be proclaimed in the whole world, that which this woman has done shall be spoken of also, for a memorial of her.

Love the Lord – with ALL your heart – even when it makes no sense at all – and if you spend your life on God it will be fragrant with grace!

TIME FOR MINISTRY

John 12:9-23 Then a great crowd of the Jews learned that He was there. And they did not come for Jesus' sake only, but also that they might see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. (10) But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus to death also, (11) because many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus because of him. (12) On the next day, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, a great crowd who had come to the Feast (13) took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. And they cried, Hosanna! "Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord!" (14) And finding an ass colt, Jesus sat on it; as it is written, (15) "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King comes sitting on the foal of an ass." (16) But His disciples did not know these things at the first. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. (17) Then the crowd witnessed, those who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead. (18) Because of this the crowd also met Him, because they heard that He had done this miracle. (19) Then the Pharisees said among themselves, Do you see how you gain nothing? Behold, the world has gone after Him. (20) And there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the Feast. (21) Then these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we want to see Jesus. (22) Philip came and told Andrew. And again Andrew and Philip told Jesus. (23) And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.

Lazarus has been raised, great crowds follow Jesus, they anoint him with perfume (verses 1-8), wave palm branches and cry Hosanna (v.13) and even the Greeks want to see Jesus. (v.21) This is a brief glorious moment of great fame before the cross. People believe in droves, the official religion of orthodox Pharisaical Judaism is collapsing. A prophet from Galilee has usurped the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees. The Messiah, "He who comes in the name of the Lord" has arrived.

The old religious order will give way to the new. The corrupt practice of selling doves and paying for priestly offices and the compromised political alignments of the clergy and the devouring of widow's houses – all the cant and hypocrisy – is about to be overthrown. Jesus is the "new broom" of the Holy Spirit and the people know it. The sick are healed and the dead are raised. Good strict rule-keepers receive nothing while penitent sinners are blessed and helped and healed.

All religious systems of salvation are about to be put out of business and replaced by repentance and faith. Jesus is not just changing the rules – He is throwing out the rulebook! No longer will anyone have to worry about which race he or she belong to, or whether they are circumcised or whether they have tithed their cumin or sacrificed a sheep. This Passover will end all Passovers.

No longer will there be special days and months and years (Galatians 4:9,10) or Sabbaths and new moons or items that are religiously taboo to taste or touch or handle (Colossians 2:8-23). The priest will no longer control access to God, the temple curtain will be torn in two and any sinner who repents and believes will be made a veritable Son of God.

Jesus proved this with Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for three days and stank and was therefore unclean. He was also unable to do any good works. By the religious canons of the Pharisees - Lazarus' sickness and premature death may also have been interpreted as judgment for sin. Yet he was raised from the dead and given life. The resurrection of Lazarus was quite obviously not due to rule keeping or to the use of certain religious rituals - but instead was due to grace. The rule-keepers could do no such miracle –but the believers could.

Rule-keepers verses believers, works versus grace. The battle was on, and the believers – those who simply used personal faith – rather than rules or rituals, were winning by miles! (When I say an "end to rules" I do not mean an end to holiness, but rather an end to access to God being based on our ability to keep laws.)

I can imagine the Jews saying "I was sick for years and the priests could do nothing for me except pile me up with rules and obligations but Jesus came along and just asked me to trust Him and it worked!" Everyone could see the obvious. The old had gone; the new had come. The Jewish religion was dying, its institutions were corrupt, its ceremonies were of no effect, and it could not heal or bless or do any good. The outcasts and the lepers and the tax collectors were getting more blessing than the scribes! God was working – but not through His system! He had abandoned it and was now working solely through Jesus. And the system knew it!

Even the Greeks had heard of Jesus and could see that He was accessible – that God's blessings could be accessible to them too - not through the Temple or through circumcision, but through Jesus Christ.

When the Greeks asked to see Jesus it meant that God in Christ was now becoming available to the Gentiles. The system crashed to earth, Jewish ownership of God was no more. A universal religion of repentance and faith - without religious rules or rituals, was born.

This prompts Jesus to say to the disciples:

John 12:23 And Jesus answered them, saying, " the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

This was it, the hour had come to end the old religious system and bring in the new. The time had come to make God accessible to all who believe - and to abolish religious rules and rituals. Judaism was tottering and it was now time to push it over and end it, to allow blessing to flow, and glorify Jesus as the One Way to God through faith. But a price must be paid. No sooner would Jesus be clearly shown to be the doorway to God's power and grace – than the door would seemingly be slammed shut by His death. For three days it would seem as if nothing remained, the temple curtain was torn, and Christ was dead.

But He would rise and ascend and send the Holy Spirit into our midst so that we might have access to God:

Ephesians 2:17-19 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near. (18) For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the

Father. (19) Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Day 3: John 12:24-36

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

John 12:24-36 Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. (25) He who loves his life shall lose it. And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. (26) If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant shall be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (27) And My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this cause I came to this hour. (28) Father, glorify Your name! Then there came a voice from the heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. (29) Then the crowd who stood by and heard said that it thundered. Others said, An angel spoke to Him. (30) Jesus answered and said, This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sakes. (31) Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. (32) And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to Myself. (33) But He said this, signifying what kind of death He was about to die. (34) The crowd answered Him, We have heard out of the Law that Christ lives forever. How do you say, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? (35) Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while the Light is with you. Walk while you have the Light, lest darkness come upon you. For he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. (36) While you have the Light, believe in the Light so that you may become sons of Light. Jesus spoke these things and departed and was hidden from them.

This whole passage derives its intensity and meaning from it being just five days before the cross. This is probably the Sunday or Monday before the Passover Friday. Jesus has entered with triumph. There is tension in the air – the popular question was “Will the Messiah win and take over from the Jewish leaders or will they kill Him first?” Jesus enigmatic answer is that He will win by being killed!

Jesus declares His death in no uncertain terms – as the seed of a new eternal world order. He says He will die, and that it will be by being “lifted up” - signifying both the cross and the later ascension into Heaven. This death would “bear much fruit” and the Christian martyrs who would follow Him in this would gain eternal life: “He who loves his life shall lose it. And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.”

Jesus loved life and healed people. He was not morbid or suicidal – but he knew that life in this world is “passing away” and that at times there can be a higher, eternal priority, for which the Christian should lay down his or her life. And when such a choice beckons, to play safe, to love one’s life here and now too much – is actually to die spiritually. (v.25) In the midst of the call to martyrdom Jesus makes clear the reward: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant shall be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” God will honor His servants – even if the world dishonors them and kills them. The condition is to go where Jesus goes – to urban slums and mission fields and

hospitals and classrooms. The servant who goes where Jesus goes will find Jesus with him or her all the time. "Where I am, there also My servant shall be" – not only on the cross but with Him in glory!

2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

Today I received an email from a fellow-missionary who trains young people to witness direct to Muslims. The young folk went out to share the faith and were terrified of persecution (in this nation they could easily have been killed) – but came back rejoicing at what God has done through them and the many believers from a single day's sharing! They "laid down their life" – at least in their own hearts –and bore much fruit!

Yet Jesus also speaks of a successful spiritual revolution: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." It's the end of the Devil being in control. In the cross the whole "kosmos" –the spiritual world system aligned in defiance of God, and its kings and its machinery of fear and oppression – will be judged. Paul tells us that the cross-tripped Satan of his weaponry:

Colossians 2:13-15 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, (14) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. (15) Having stripped rulers and authorities, He made a show of them publicly, triumphing over them in it.

The cry of Jesus is not for His own protection but for God's greater glory: "(27) And My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this cause I came to this hour. (28) Father, glorify Your name! Then there came a voice from the heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. "

Jesus was prepared to die that His Father might be glorified. These were His reasons for the cross – *the Father's glory, the Devil's doom (1 John 3:8) and our salvation (John 3:16). A voice came from Heaven – just as it did at His baptism, and it was audible and loud and those around thought that it thundered. This was similar to the audible voice that spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:4-7). In this case it seems that Jesus and the disciples heard it but the Jews misunderstood it as either thunder or an angel. This leads into a short discourse on their lack of spiritual perception. (30) Jesus answered and said, this voice did not come because of Me, but for your sakes. (31)*

Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. (32) And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to Myself. (33) But He said this, signifying what kind of death He was about to die. (34) The crowd answered Him, We have heard out of the Law that Christ lives forever. How do you say, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? (35) Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while the Light is with you. Walk while you have the Light, lest darkness come upon you. For he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. (36) While you have the Light, believe in the Light so that you may become sons of Light.

Jesus spoke these things and departed and was hidden from them. The voice was not for Jesus' benefit but for theirs –a clear attestation to His Messianic identity. It was to help them believe, and they seemed to get to the point that He "might be the Christ" but

immediately question this as soon as He speaks of the cross: "The crowd answered Him, We have heard out of the Law that Christ lives forever. How do you say, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

Jesus presses them to believe – and to do so immediately: "While you have the Light, believe in the Light so that you may become sons of Light." There is a chance for a new nature – as a "son of light" as an eternal being. It was a fleeting opportunity a moment when the Truth could be grasped. After this they would go back to stumbling around in darkness. This tells us that such faith is not merely doctrinal - because you can believe a doctrine any time you like! Rather it is revelatory and personal faith and involves a transforming connection to God in a holy moment of grace. It is the sort of faith that changes the person into a "son of light" – that is a living, saving faith that makes a difference! As Colossians says:

Colossians 1:12-14 giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. (13) For He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; (14) in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins. The faith of the Christian takes us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light and redeems us. This is more than knowledge – it is grace!

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Day 4 - John 12:37-43

THE COST OF BELIEVING

John 12:37-43 But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they did not believe on Him, (38) so that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (39) Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, (40) "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (41) Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. (42) Still, however, even out of the rulers, many did believe on Him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; (43) for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God.

It is hard for many people to believe. They are blinded and hard of hearing and ensnared in their sins and hardened in their hearts. We often under-estimate the intransigence of selfish people. In His parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 it Jesus makes the following point:

Luke 16:27-31 And he said, I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, (28) for I have five brothers, so that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment. (29) Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them. (30) And he said, No, father Abraham, but if one should go

to them from the dead, they would repent. (31) And he said to him, If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded, even though one rose from the dead.

Miracles, healings, and the raising of Lazarus did not convince the unbelieving Jews. Neither did Jesus' exceptional character and teachings convince them and neither has two thousand years of Christian witness has not persuaded them. They seem determined not to believe! Paul explains their stubbornness thus:

Romans 11:25-27 For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, lest you should be wise within yourselves; that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the nations has come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. (27) For this is My covenant with them, when I have taken away their sins."

Israel and the Jews are hardened, and will not believe, until "the fullness of the nations has come in". Their stubbornness is a supernatural stubbornness ordained by God – and their own will, their own choice. This does not predestine all Jews to unbelief – my great grandmother was a Jew, who believed and even became a missionary in China. In fact she was a Cohen and a cousin of the Rothschild family and was disinherited from a large fortune for her faith.

When Jews do believe they are rejected for it. "Still, however, even out of the rulers, many did believe on Him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God. " Even to this today the WORST thing a Jew can do is to become a confessing active evangelical Christian. The state of Israel will recognize Muslims and Buddhists of Jewish descent as Israelis – but not Christians of Jewish descent. If a Jew becomes a confessing Christian they leave the embrace of the Jewish community.

We see this in the Jewish reaction to films about Jesus such as Cecil B. De Mille's "King of Kings" and Mel Gibson's "The Passion" both of which were accused of being anti-Semitic. Any strong depiction of Jesus arouses the same Jewish reaction that Jesus did in His own day. Jesus spells the end of their system - the last prophet before the destruction of the Temple and the Great Dispersion.

Many Jews did believe – even from among the believers – and these became Christians. Those who did not believe became the forefathers of the Jews today. Judaism today is the unbelieving remnant of the Jewish faith.

Why then is faith so difficult for Jews, Muslims and countless other people? Why are there areas that are "hard" and resistant? Why is the parable of the four soils – the hard path, the shallow soil, the soil with weeds and the good soil – so true of humanity? There are perhaps four or five reasons.

The work of Satan:

2 Corinthians 4:4 in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving ones, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should not dawn on them.

An inner veil that comes from trying to be saved by works of the Law:

2 Corinthians 3:14-16 (But their thoughts were blinded; for until the present the same veil remains on the reading of the old covenant, not taken away.) But this veil has been done away in Christ. (15) But until this day, when Moses is read, the veil is on their heart. (16) But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Vanity, Ignorance and Lust:

Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should not walk from now on as other nations walk, in the vanity of their mind, (18) having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. (19) For they, being past feeling, have given themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Hatred:

1 John 2:11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because darkness has blinded his eyes.

Greed, Materialism and Covetousness:

Matthew 6:20-23 But lay up treasures in Heaven for yourselves, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (22) The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body shall be full of light. (23) But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Revelation 3:17 Because you say, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Thus, faith is not just a matter of evidence and intellect or of a convincing testimony. Faith is rooted in the inner man and in spiritual and moral issues such as spiritual pride, lust, ignorance and materialism. How many refuse to believe because they know they will have to give up some sin or make a major lifestyle change?

Think of the five brothers of the rich man – what would faith have meant for them? Obeying the Law and the Prophets and being kind to the poor. Too much; too hard; too big a change. We will finish with a section from the parable of the rich young ruler:

Matthew 19: 21-26 Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. And come, follow Me. (22) But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. (23) Then Jesus said to His disciples, Truly I say to you that a rich man will with great difficulty enter into the kingdom of Heaven. (24) And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (25) When His disciples heard, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? (26) But Jesus looked on them and said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

SENT BY THE FATHER

John 12:44-50 But Jesus cried out and said, He who believes on Me does not believe on Me but on Him who sent Me. (45) And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. (46) I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in darkness. (47) And if any one hears My Words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I do not come to judge the world, but to save the world. (48) He who rejects Me and does not receive My Words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (49) For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak.

Jesus claims to be sent by God, (v44) that whoever sees Him sees God (v.45) that He hears from God (v 49,50) and speaks the very words God, (v49,50) and that His words will be the standard for eternal judgment (v48.) Whoever makes these extraordinary claims is either - God, a lunatic, or the worst kind of calculating spiritual deceiver. A mere prophet or a good pious man does not claim that his words shall judge people on the last day. Not even Moses would say "And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. " or "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

These are the sort of claims that would get you classified as a schizophrenic and locked away! "I hear voices, my words are important, God speaks to me, I am a prophet. " But Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after three days! Jesus walked the talk! If He was a schizophrenic He was one that did large numbers of miracles! Jesus was not a madman – His teachings were wise, His actions were loving, and He was able to hold His own in society with the teachers and leaders of the day. Thus He was utterly sane – but a sane Man that claimed to be God's image and God's spokesman.

The same goes for saying He was just a manipulative cult leader – an evil deceiver who claimed divine revelation - sane but bad. Such leaders consume their followers – but Jesus died for His followers and they all lived (except Judas) ! And then there were the miracles, the teaching, the defending of the weak and the acceptance of lepers and His simple lifestyle. If Jesus was neither mad nor bad, if indeed He was both sane and good – then how can He dare to claim such things? And if these claims are indeed true – what are the implications for us?

"I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in darkness." In other words the normal state of humanity is "in darkness" and that is where we remain unless we receive the Light – by believing in Jesus Christ. Even though the Jews had many religious teachers and Moses and the Prophets and the learning of the East and of Babylon – they were still "in darkness". Darkness is not lack of knowledge – but lack of faith in God.

"And if any one hears My Words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I do not come to judge the world, but to save the world. " Jesus came to rescue us from that darkness and to bring us into the kingdom of light. He is not interested in judging us – only in saving us.

. "He who rejects Me and does not receive My Words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. " He wants us to believe – and thus to escape the judgment that is coming. For none of us have lived by Jesus' words - such as the Sermon On The Mount. If those are the words that unbelievers are judged by on the last day – then unbelievers are doomed.

So somehow, by believing in Jesus, we escape judgment and enter into eternal life:
John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life.

This is because the words Jesus speaks are special words – words given by God, commandments that are eternal life. "For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak."

God spoke in Christ and when we believe the words of Christ we believe the words of God. Jesus even claimed as much: "But Jesus cried out and said, He who believes on Me does not believe on Me but on Him who sent Me. "

Therefore the revelation of Christ is the revelation of God and this revelation is so close and exact that Jesus can say: "And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. " and later on in *John 14:9 Jesus said to him, Have I been with you such a long time and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. And how do you say, Show us the Father?*

This is born out in the rest of the New Testament:
Colossians 1:15 who is the image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at many times and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, (3) who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, through Himself cleansing of our sins, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high, Jesus is the exact image of God, who speaks the very words of God and who upholds Creation by the word of His power and who grants eternal life. In other words: For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

Jesus is God. He is not a mere man, or a good man, or a bad man, or a mad-man or even a prophet. No prophet upholds the Universe! Jesus is God – pure and simple and God come in human flesh so that we might be saved – therefore we must believe His words.

John 12:44-50 But Jesus cried out and said, He who believes on Me does not believe on Me but on Him who sent Me. (45) And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. (46) I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in

darkness. (47) And if any one hears My Words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I do not come to judge the world, but to save the world. (48) He who rejects Me and does not receive My Words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (49) For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak.

Jesus claims to be sent by God, (v44) that whoever sees Him sees God (v.45) that He hears from God (v 49,50) and speaks the very words God, (v49,50) and that His words will be the standard for eternal judgment (v48.)

Whoever makes these extraordinary claims is either - God, a lunatic, or the worst kind of calculating spiritual deceiver. A mere prophet or a good pious man does not claim that his words shall judge people on the last day. Not even Moses would say "And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. " or "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

These are the sort of claims that would get you classified as a schizophrenic and locked away! "I hear voices, my words are important, God speaks to me, I am a prophet. " But Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after three days! Jesus walked the talk! If He was a schizophrenic He was one that did large numbers of miracles! Jesus was not a madman – His teachings were wise, His actions were loving, and He was able to hold His own in society with the teachers and leaders of the day. Thus He was utterly sane – but a sane Man that claimed to be God's image and God's spokesman.

The same goes for saying He was just a manipulative cult leader – an evil deceiver who claimed divine revelation - sane but bad. Such leaders consume their followers – but Jesus died for His followers and they all lived (except Judas) ! And then there were the miracles, the teaching, the defending of the weak and the acceptance of lepers and His simple lifestyle.

If Jesus was neither mad nor bad, if indeed He was both sane and good – then how can He dare to claim such things? And if these claims are indeed true – what are the implications for us? "I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in darkness." In other words the normal state of humanity is "in darkness" and that is where we remain unless we receive the Light – by believing in Jesus Christ. Even though the Jews had many religious teachers and Moses and the Prophets and the learning of the East and of Babylon – they were still "in darkness". Darkness is not lack of knowledge – but lack of faith in God.

"And if any one hears My Words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I do not come to judge the world, but to save the world. " Jesus came to rescue us from that darkness and to bring us into the kingdom of light. He is not interested in judging us – only in saving us.

"He who rejects Me and does not receive My Words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. " He wants us to believe – and thus to escape the judgment that is coming. For none of us have lived by Jesus' words - such as the Sermon On The Mount. If those are the words that unbelievers are judged by

on the last day – then unbelievers are doomed. So somehow, by believing in Jesus, we escape judgment and enter into eternal life:

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life.

This is because the words Jesus speaks are special words – words given by God, commandments that are eternal life. "For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak."

God spoke in Christ and when we believe the words of Christ we believe the words of God. Jesus even claimed as much: "But Jesus cried out and said, He who believes on Me does not believe on Me but on Him who sent Me. "Therefore the revelation of Christ is the revelation of God and this revelation is so close and exact that Jesus can say: "And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. " and later on in John 14:9 Jesus said to him, *Have I been with you such a long time and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. And how do you say, Show us the Father?*

This is born out in the rest of the New Testament:

Colossians 1:15 who is the image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at many times and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, (3) who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, through Himself cleansing of our sins, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high,

Jesus is the exact image of God, who speaks the very words of God and who upholds Creation by the word of His power and who grants eternal life. In other words: *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)*

Jesus is God. He is not a mere man, or a good man, or a bad man, or a madman or even a prophet. No prophet upholds the Universe! Jesus is God –pure and simple and God come in human flesh so that we might be saved – therefore we must believe His words.

Day 6 - John 13:1-4

FORGIVENESS

John 13:1-4 And before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come when He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own in the world, He loved them to the end. (2) And when supper had ended, the Devil now having put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon to betray Him, (3) Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and went to God, (4) He rose up from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself.

John's talent for dramatic juxtaposition is most evident here. Jesus is at the height of His Messianic self-awareness and power "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and went to God"— and He picks up a towel and washes the disciples feet. What a Lord! What a humble Savior! He even washes Judas' feet!

No matter how high we may be, even an apostle or a great evangelist, we must still serve others. The internationally known bible-teacher John Stott visited a church in the Philippines and a friend commented, "He is so humble, he even washed his own plate." We should all have a witness like that! Jesus washed not only His own plate – but the feet of others.

There is no place for lordly conceit or mega-star status in the Church of God. If we roll into town in a limousine and sweep past the poor and have bodyguards and dazzling jewelry and act with haughty disdain – then we are not of Christ!

To Jesus everyone was important, and worth serving and worth dying for. Jesus did not divide humanity into an "A list" and "the rest". When Jesus threw a banquet the poor and the lame and the sinners were welcome. There was no muscle-bound bodyguard on the door keeping out the "undesirables". Thus Hollywood society and Jesus kingdom are exact opposites.

For those of us who travel in ministry and speak at conferences it is easy to get a swelled head. To think we are important and to insist on certain perks. How can we counter this?

Always eat whatever set before you, often stay in the houses of the saints rather than hotels, make time for people even when you are tired, refuse flattery, and try not to see some people as useful and others as not so useful.

The other thing is to always keep in mind the poor in God's kingdom - to consciously serve the suffering church and its needs. It is far easier to always serve the rich church and its needs!

This means my ministry is focused on training pastors in Asia especially those pastors that work among the urban poor in the shantytowns of the mega-cities. As I focus on meeting the needs of people that can never repay me, who will not ever send in a donation – then I am starting to wash the feet of the saints.

Jesus served all. He served Nicodemus and he served Mary Magdalene. He served both Judas and Peter. None of us are worthy of His love and yet we all can receive it. This breaks me – that he who has power over all things should meet my needs. If you had power over the entire world what would you do? Pick up a towel and wash feet? Jesus who made the world, served us.

What we do when we have power over others shows what is in our heart. The High Priest had power over Jesus and crucified Him, the Roman soldiers had power over Jesus and scourged Him, the passers-by used their power to hurl insults at a helpless Savior. If someone is totally in your power –you must love them and serve them – and no more so than in marriage as a husband to a wife. Husband – wash the feet of your wife!

Ephesians 5:25-29 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, (26) that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, (27) that He might present it to Himself as the glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So men ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord loves the church.

Now Jesus does this at the end of the Supper “And when supper had ended”. The Passover was to eaten in haste with sandals on one’s feet (Exodus 12:11) – so they kept their shoes on as good Jews. Jesus kept even these small points of the Law. He kept the traditions – then dispensed with them. Then He used the occasion of taking off the shoes as a teaching point.

The end of the last Passover supper was the beginning of a new “ritual” – the ritual of humble service! (Just in case you are confused, Jewish days were sundown to sundown thus the supper was in the Passover evening, which was before the Passover daytime (Good Friday). So it the foot washing was after the Passover meal but before Passover morning.)

“When Jesus knew that His hour had come when He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own in the world, He loved them to the end.” Jesus was a sojourner. He was here for a little while - then the time came for Him to leave and go back to the Father.

Love must dictate our actions even at the point of departure to be with God:

Philippians 1:22-24 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet I do not know what I shall choose. (23) For I am pressed together by the two: having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. (24) But to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

He loved them to the end. Of course, for God is love and Jesus is God. We also should not stop loving others. There is no point when we can say "Enough, I've loved enough, now I will take it easy and serve no more, now others will serve me." Love endures in service. Do not grow weary in doing what is right!

Day 7 - John 13:5-19

SERVANTHOOD

John 13:5 – 19 After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (6) Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, Lord, do You wash my feet? (7) Jesus answered and said to him, You do not know what I do now, but you shall know hereafter. (8) Peter said to Him, You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. (9) Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and head. (10) Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. And you are clean, but not all. (11) For He knew who would betray Him. Therefore He said, You are not all clean. (12) So after He had washed their feet and had taken His garments and had reclined again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? (13) You call Me the Teacher, and Lord, and you say well, for I AM. (14) If then I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. (16) Truly, truly, I say to you, A servant is not greater than his master, neither is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. (17) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (18) I do not speak of you all; I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me." (19) From now I tell you before it comes, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM.

Judas, though washed, was not clean. "And you are clean, but not all. For He knew who would betray Him. Therefore He said, You are not all clean."

Judas had no part in the Kingdom of God – despite being with Jesus. An unclean and treacherous heart has no place in Heaven.

Judas obeyed the law and cooperated with the authorities – especially the religious ones. He was a model citizen – in a police state, a paid informer. You see there are some things that are more important than "the rules" and one of them is the truth –and Jesus was the truth.

The terrible fate of Judas started by pilfering from the plate. It started with greed and dishonesty and wound up with betrayal, demon-possession and suicide. Judas let a little evil in – and it took him over completely. Sins such as greed, promiscuity, envy and pornography can consume people. They establish a foothold and make the person unclean – and eventually they become a dwelling place for Satan.

The solution is regular spiritual cleaning – washing the feet: “Jesus answered him, Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. (9) Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and head. (10) Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.”

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me” – unless Jesus personally cleanses us with His blood we cannot have fellowship with God. By corollary – we cannot cleanse ourselves and no other person can cleanse us. “unless I” means no other but Christ.

“He who has bathed” – the baptized born-again believer. “has no need except to wash his feet,” – just needs to deal with the “dust of the road”, the incidental sins, not with the major problem of being unregenerate. “but is clean every whit” – is fully acceptable to the Father.

There are at least four agents that cleanse Christians: the Spirit, the Word, baptism and the blood.

THE WASHING OF THE SPIRIT – renews our inner nature:

Titus 3:5-6 not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

THE WASHING WITH THE WORD – purifies us, especially for service in the Church:

Ephesians 5:26-27 that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, (27) that He might present it to Himself as the glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

John 15:3 Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you.

THE WASHING OF BAPTISM – is conditional on repentance and faith and deals with the fundamental sin problem:

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies having been washed with pure water.

Acts 22:16 And now what do you intend? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

1 Peter 3:21 which figure now also saves us, baptism; not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE WASHING BY THE BLOOD – continually cleanses us from all sin and enables us to have intimate fellowship with God:

Revelation 7:14 And I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes, and have whitened them in the blood of the Lamb.

1 John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that

we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Summary: Sin can enter in and defile us unless we seek cleansing from Christ – and Christ alone. Upon repentance and faith we experience the cleaning from sin that is baptism, that is the Him who bathed” of our passage. Then the Holy Spirit washes us from a vast range of inner defilements and sins (1 Corinthians 6:10,11) with the washing of regeneration. Then as we learn God’s Word we become the pure bride of Christ fitted for service as the disciples were (John 15:3) And finally the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin and brings us into full intimate communion and fellowship with God.

Day 8 - John 13:20-30

THE BETRAYAL

John 13: 20-30 Truly, truly, I say to you, He who receives whomever I send receives Me. And he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. (21) When Jesus had said this, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Truly, truly, I say to you that one of you shall betray Me. (22) Then the disciples looked upon one another, wondering of whom He spoke. (23) But there was one of His disciples leaning upon Jesus' bosom, the one whom Jesus loved. (24) Simon Peter therefore signaled to him to ask whom it might be of whom He spoke. (25) And lying on Jesus' breast, he said to him, Lord, who is it? (26) Jesus answered, It is he to whom I shall give the morsel when I have dipped it. And dipping the morsel, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. (27) And after the morsel, then Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly. (28) But no one reclining knew for what reason He spoke this to him. (29) For some thought, because Judas had the moneybag, that Jesus had said to him, Buy what we have need of for the feast; or that he should give something to the poor. (30) He then, having received the morsel, went out immediately. And it was night.

Simon Peter, John, Jesus and Judas – at the moment of betrayal. No-one guessed that Judas was the betrayer. Even 60 years later as John wrote this in 90 A.D. his loathing of Judas is clear. The apostles also felt betrayed – it was the end of the best time of their lives and an insidious attack upon their Lord.

Jesus is “troubled in spirit” – He was not always calm, Jesus was not a saccharine saint with a bland and tranquillized demeanor. God does not ask us to dissolve our personality but rather speaks through it.

“But there was one of His disciples leaning upon Jesus' bosom, the one whom Jesus loved.” This was John (see John 21:21-25). John’s claim to fame was not leadership – but intimacy. Peter would lead, and from Pentecost on would be the Rock of the early church. But John was the favorite, the one whom Jesus loved. Now Jesus loved them all – but in a special sense John was closer and the one who leaned on Jesus’ breast.

John is active in the early church as one of the main three (Jesus, James and John), with Peter he healed the lame man, went to Samaria and later met Paul (Galatians 1) who

considered John a pillar of the church. Then after his brother James is executed and Peter is arrested and scheduled for execution, John vanishes from the record, appearing no further in Acts and in none of the list of greetings – even to Ephesus where church tradition has him operating. John may have chosen to be “underground” realizing that he was so deeply hated by the Jews, and was such a prime target, that open ministry was impossible. He may have deliberately asked not be mentioned in dispatches – as many missionaries in closed countries also do today. He even became so security conscious that he wrote letters such as 2 John using “code” words such as “beloved lady” for Church and would say. “Having many things to write to you, I do not want to say with paper and ink”. (2 John 1,12) Church tradition has him making many disciples in Ephesus including some of the main bishops of the early church such as Polycarp. Well after 70 AD, when the power of the Jewish temple is broken, John re-emerges into the public light to write his gospel.

Simon Peter asks John to ask Jesus what He meant. And Jesus replies in a discrete way that delicately preserves Judas’ sense of honor. “Jesus answered, It is he to whom I shall give the morsel when I have dipped it. And dipping the morsel, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.” At this point Judas knew that Jesus knew. And Jesus confirmed it: “Then Jesus said to him, what you do, do quickly.” Judas must have been stunned. But no one else knew. Judas must have burned with shame, maybe even rushed out of the room, but they all thought he was just doing an errand. As Judas rushed to the High Priest he must have thought: “Jesus knew my treachery – and He ate with me, Jesus knew and He washed my feet, Jesus knew and He saved my face...”

Judas son-of Simon may have been the grandson of Annas the high priest. Judas was a southerner, from Judah, and seems to have known the temple authorities and had access to them. The high priest Annas had a wayward son called Simon who “married strange wives” and Judas may have been born of these. However the names Simon and Judas were common among supporters of the Maccabean revolt. Judas also is pronounced “Judah” in Aramaic and thus is a type of the fate of the unbelieving Jews.

“And after the morsel, then Satan entered into him.” The Supper was Judas’ undoing and the point when Satan entered into him. Judas did not invoke Satan to enter him - he just refused Christ’s love for him. Satan physically entered Judas used him then destroyed him. If we put together a few historical accounts it appears that Judas became suddenly physically bloated with something like elephantiasis, went out, hanged himself and burst open in a truly horrible and demonic death.

The presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is real – and even dangerous. Paul writes: *1 Corinthians 11:27-30 So that whoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, he will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (28) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. (29) For he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks condemnation (lit. damnation/judgment) to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and many sleep (Note: that is they die).*

Failure to observe the Lord’s Supper with consciousness of Christ and proper order and reverence - results in sickness, death, and in Judas’ case damnation. This is puzzling to the modern mind - but we are dealing with the spiritual world here. “He then, having received

the morsel, went out immediately. And it was night." The betrayer arises, Satan enters in and the darkness falls. John often uses the metaphor of darkness for evil – and of evil that is ultimately unsuccessful and is vanquished.

John 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.
In this moment of sheer Satanic triumph, Jesus is unperturbed, and begins His greatest few hours of teaching, while the Devil rages outside.

Day 9 -John 13:31-38

SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE

John 13:31-38 Then when he had left, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. (32) If God is glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall immediately glorify Him. (33) Little children, I am with you yet a little while. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, Where I go, you cannot come, so I now say to you. (34) I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you should also love one another. (35) By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love toward one another. (36) Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, where do You go? Jesus answered him, Where I go you cannot now follow Me, but you shall follow Me afterward. (37) Peter said to Him, Lord, why cannot I follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake. (38) Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for My sake? Truly, truly, I say to you, The cock shall not crow until you have denied Me three times.

As Judas leaves, Jesus says that He is glorified. Not "will be glorified" – but "is glorified". Present tense. And the hours following prove Him right – the Last Supper, Gethsemane the cross and the resurrection are His glory – and Judas set in all in motion! God uses even betrayal for His glory! (But woe to the betrayer!) Jesus then gives a "new commandment" – "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you should also love one another. (35) By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love toward one another. " What is so new about this? Love your neighbor was an old, old commandment from the Jewish Law (Leviticus 19:18). The radical bit is: "As I have loved you, you should also love one another"; in other words, self-sacrificing, foot-washing, servant love. Love that sees the other person as infinitely precious and worthy!

This command is surrounded by talk of death and "Where I go, you cannot come" which Peter understands all too clearly when he replies "Lord, why cannot I follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake. " The whole context of this command is self-sacrifice one for the other.

John explains this very clearly in his first epistle:

1 John 3:16-20 This is how we have come to know love: Christ gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers. (17) Whoever has earthly possessions and notices a brother in need and yet withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God

remain in him? (18) Little children, we must stop loving in word and in tongue, but instead love in action and in truth. (19) And this is how we will know that we belong to the truth and how we will be able to establish our hearts in his presence. (20) If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

The loyalty within the Christian community should be so intense that we would give our lives for each other – and act with compassion spending this world's goods for a brother or sister in need. That does not mean that we have to give to all the charities that advertise on TV – but when we see someone at church – with a real need, that we can meet. Then we ought to do our best to help. Practical, compassionate Christian love is a sign that God's love is truly in our hearts and helps to reassure us that we are truly saved and possess a new nature.

Jesus says that this kind of self-sacrificing agape love is our best witness. "By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love toward one another." When unbelievers point to someone and say "There goes a real Christian" it is a "Mother Teresa" they point to someone showing agape love. And when they say "there goes a phony" they mean someone who is a love-less hypocrite. Agape love is the big kahuna. It is the one thing we MUST have in our lives.

Paul puts it like this:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of humans and angels but have no love, I have become a reverberating gong or a clashing cymbal. (2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all secrets and every form of knowledge, and if I have absolute faith so as to move mountains but have no love, I am nothing. (3) Even if I give away all that I have and surrender my body so that I may boast but have no love, I get nothing out of it.

The new commandment can only be lived out by the new creation. It is absolutely impossible for the flesh to be that self-sacrificing. In fact the whole system of Christian reward revolves around "impossible" self-sacrificing love: See *Matthew 5:5,12, 6:1-4, 10:39-42, 16:24-28, 19:29 Luke 6:22-24, 35, 1 Corinthians 9:16-18; Colossians 3:22-24; Hebrews 10:35, 11:6, 11:26; 1 Peter 1:4, 3:9; 2 John 1:8*. If you check these verses you will find that we are not rewarded on a tally sheet for how many converts we make. Rather we are rewarded for our conformity to the principles of agape love. A successful evangelist who is selfish, exploitative and mean will receive much less of a reward than the humblest saint that lives in love.

The new commandment is tough and even Peter could not live it until Pentecost. The cock crowed and self-preservation cut in. Only a might anointing with the Holy Ghost can make us holy and loving and able to live the life Jesus wants us to live.

Why not pray for that anointing right now? "Lord Jesus, I cannot love others as You have commanded me to – unless You make me loving. I will arrive in Heaven with no reward at all unless You change me. Anoint me, fill me, change me and renew me. Do whatever it takes to make me full of agape love and make me a Christian who lives agape love on a daily basis. In Your Holy Name. Amen".

Day 10 - John 14:1-7

A PLACE IN HEAVEN

John 14: 1-7 You believe in God, believe also in Me. Let not your heart be troubled (2) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. (4) And where I go you know, and the way you know. (5) Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where You go, and how can we know the way? (6) Jesus said to him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me. (7) If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. And from now on you know Him and have seen Him.

What a profound passage of Scripture! What words of life!

Jesus is asking them to have the same faith in Him that they have in God! "You believe in God, believe also in Me." This would clearly be blasphemy - even if uttered by an Old Testament prophet! It is a direct claim to religious loyalty. Jesus is worthy of our faith - our ultimate trust.

The purpose of faith in Christ is peace in Christ. "Let not your heart be troubled.." People, relationships, and circumstances easily trouble us. Dealing with bureaucracy or sitting in traffic can make us boil and fume. But faith in Jesus Christ can give us an inner peace that transcends human circumstances:

Philippians 4:6-7 MKJV Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

For the disciples they were not to be anxious about the betrayal, trial and crucifixion of their Lord! They were to trust Jesus in even that! Jesus - even at His "weakest and craziest" (let me say that is from the world's view of the cross) is worth trusting!

Jesus was going to prepare a place for them - a new home in heaven where there are "many mansions". It means there is living space for the righteous with God and that Jesus wants His disciples to be where He is - in Heaven. Thus God will not isolate Himself from us but dwell with us in love. God is saying "I want to have you around living in My Home."

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. "

God is a God of love and of fellowship. He invented family and warmth and friendship and Heaven will be accepting, joyful and our true home! In verse 6 Jesus makes His famous statement about being the Way, the Truth and the Life. In our multi-cultural, inter-faith, post-modern age this is a jaw-dropper and conversation stopper. It is viewed as intolerant or egotistical, but it is the truth! Jesus is the only way to God because He is the only person to have provided an answer to the problem of sin.

No other faith has an answer to the need for forgiveness with God and no other faith can give us a new nature - a born-again inner being. Jesus then makes the point perfectly clear by adding: "no one comes to the Father but by Me." This has enormous significance for evangelism and missions. All roads do not lead to the same God. In fact Paul says that the Gentiles "worship demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20) and that the unbelieving Jews are still in need of salvation through Christ. (Romans 10:1-6) If you want to be saved - then the only way is through Christ. We dare not make up our own system based on works or demonic counterfeits. Salvation is not through a human system or a denomination - but through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Religious knowledge or church attendance cannot replace the need for saving faith in Jesus. One test of saving faith is that state of your heart - is it trusting in God, or always troubled? Do you really believe in Jesus to the point of having a certain trust in His goodness and power - or is He just an idea?

Jesus is the way to the Father because He is the very image of the Father. If we have seen Jesus then we have seen the Father, if we know Jesus, then we know the Father. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. And from now on you know Him and have seen Him. " A few verses later Jesus says "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father".

In other words if we want to know what God is like - we should behold Christ! The idea that the Father is very judgmental and Jesus is all mercy is nonsense. The character of the Father is perfectly expressed in the Son. God the Father is just as loving and kind and His Son, and the Son is just as holy and just as the Father. (See also Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3) Jesus is the way to God because He is the truth about God and the very life of God. He is not just a prophet telling us about God - rather He is God telling us about God! Jesus is the image of God showing us God. He is the life of God showing us how God's eternal life works.

If Jesus is interested in healing us - then God the Father is interested in healing us. If Jesus is a friend of sinners, then God the Father is a friend of sinners. If Jesus cares about hungry crowds and gives them food - then God the Father is also the one who provides manna in the wilderness. Thus when we pray we should pray with confidence knowing that God cares for us and is interested in us.

Thus our hearts should not be troubled for to believe in Jesus is to believe in God and if God is like Jesus then the Universe is a fundamentally safe and good place. The Universe also contains many safe places that are far from this crazy world - our mansions in Heaven, so we will ultimately end up in safe place with a safe God.

Day 11 - John 14:8-15

I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE

John 14: 8-15 MKJV Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. (9) Jesus said to him, Have I been with you such a long time and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. And how do you say, Show us the Father? (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The Words that I speak to you I do not speak of Myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works. (11) Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the very works themselves. (12) Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (15) If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Jesus says that the very words and works He does come directly from the Father, that they are done because the Father dwells in Him, and that we will do "greater works" as we shall also be God-indwelt through the Holy Spirit (verse 15 and following). As God-indwelt, born-again true believers we will also have a special relationship with God and we will be able ask anything in Jesus' name and He will do it. Jesus asks, almost in frustration: "Do you not believe that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me?"

One illustration that explains this seeming paradox is of a bottle thrown into the ocean, the ocean fills the bottle - so the ocean is "in the bottle" at the same time that the bottle is "in the ocean". We are in Christ and Christ is in us and Christ is in God and God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Jesus was completely full of God and was "the fullness of deity in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9) and yet He was also in God and solely directed by God. For Jesus the Father was His world - that which He dwelt in and lived for. "The Words that I speak to you I do not speak of Myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works" - the Greek is critical to understanding this verse. "Words" is "rhemata" - utterance, sayings, spoken words, words of power for a given moment, the spoken word of spiritual command such as "rise up and walk" rather than the logos word of written Scripture. G4487 rhema *hray'-mah* From G4483; an *utterance* (individually, collectively or specifically); by implication a *matter* or *topic* (especially of narration, command or dispute); with a negative *naught* whatever: - + evil, + nothing, saying, word. (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries).

Thus when Jesus ministered and spoke a word of utterance such as "Peace, be still" or "Eyes, be opened" or "Be cleansed" these words did not come from Him - but from the Father. They were God's commands to His Creation, uttered through the voice of His Son! Most of Jesus works were done by words, words of power. From the raising of Lazarus, to the healing of a lame man, to the casting out of a demon, to teaching a disciple, words were Jesus main tools. But they were words spoken with power, words that changed things, words with authority because they were grounded in God the Father. That is why Jesus can

treat His words and His works as virtually identical and construct what seems to be a confusing sentence: "The Words that I speak to you I do not speak of Myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works."

"Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the very works themselves. (12) Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater *works* than these he shall do, because I go to My Father." Jesus going to the Father was the Ascension-Pentecost event, which resulted in "taking captivity captive" that is the spoiling of the principalities and powers - and "gifts being given to men" - gifts of the Holy Spirit. With Satan's power greatly reduced by the cross and the Spirit bestowed on the Church in power at Pentecost Jesus anticipated that they would do "greater works" than He did.

[Articles giving a detailed explanation of the Ascension and the Enthronement of Jesus can be found at: <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/messiah/>] These greater works would be a result of prayer and supplication in the name of Jesus - "ask...and I will" or as Jesus says: "And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*."

So we are to ask the Father, in the name of Jesus, to do mighty works, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Now lets tie this in with the way Jesus did mighty works - through words of power and words of command sourced in God who dwelt in Him. We are to ask the Father - and He will give us a word to speak that will heal the sick, raise the dead or change the situation! God will empower us to glorify the Son through use of the rhema word of power. The most common such situation is rebuking Satan and casting out demons. We enter into the situation in the name of Jesus, we speak a word given to us by God, and the demon leaves. This word may almost be a formula such as "Come out of him in the name of Jesus" or involve some insight "spirit of bitterness, leave him now". By using words of commands I have many times seen real physical healings - whereas prior to using words of command I saw no healings at all.

Before you write this off as rabid Pentecostalism - try it. Ask God to give you a word for a situation just as He gave them to Jesus and the apostles "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" and so on. Paul even used a word of power when confronting the sorcerer Elymas: Acts 13:9-11 ASV *But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him, (10) and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? (11) And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.*

And Ananias did a similar thing when healing Paul - laying on his hands and speaking the words God had given him for that situation:
Acts 9:17-18 ASV And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou comest, hath sent me, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy

Spirit. (18) And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized.

If we are to fulfill Jesus' expectation that we would do great works, it makes sense that we would do those mighty works the same way He did them - by speaking words from the Father. So when you come to an "impossible situation". Ask Jesus about it, and also ask Him for a word that will change that situation - such as "Lazarus, come forth". (Let me quickly add these are not magical incantations but rather are God's words for that particular situation.) Speak what God wants spoken. This is a learned skill, and it feels very risky, and I am still learning it, but it does work. Really, when it comes to miracles we have no choice; we cannot work them with computers! We only have words, words from God, uttered in faith, and all done in the name of Jesus.

Day 12 - John 14:16-26

THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 14: 16-26 MKJV And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, so that He may be with you forever, (17) the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you. (18) I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. (19) Yet a little while and the world does not see Me any more. But you see Me. Because I live, you shall live also. (20) At that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (21) He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him. (22) Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, Lord, how is it that You will reveal Yourself to us and not to the world? (23) Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves Me, he will keep My Word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (24) He who does not love Me does not keep My Words, and the Word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (25) I have spoken these things to you, being present with you. (26) But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you.

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter and our Teacher who is both with us and in us and teaches us all things - especially how to love God, love others and fulfill the commands of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit has three main operations in the life of the born-again Christian:

1. The washing of sanctification. (*1 Corinthians 6:10,11*)
2. Instruction in "all things" (*John 14:26, 1 John 2:20,27*) and especially in remembrance of Christ and His commandments (*John 14:16-26*) and in revealing to us what God has prepared for those who love Him (*1 Corinthians 2:9-16*).
3. Pouring the love of God into our hearts so that we are filled with hope (*Romans 5: 1-5*) and strengthened in the inner man so that we can know the love of Christ and be matured in Him as persons. (*Ephesians 3:14--21*).

That is why Jesus says "I will love him and reveal myself to him." concerning obedient Christians who love the Lord. The Christian walk, for an obedient faith-filled believer should be a process of feeling loved by Jesus and coming to know Him in ever-deeper ways - yet this was not my experience for many years. Suspicious of subjectivism and emotion and wary of religious claims and seeing the Holy Spirit as one who "convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment" I had a stern view of God.

Two bible passages opened my eyes to a more wonderful truth. They were *1 Corinthians 2:9-16* about the things God has prepared for those who love Him, and Paul prayer in *Ephesians 3:14-21*. These passages convinced me that the path to maturity as a saint is to accept God's love and God's truth through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (see also *Romans 5:1-5*). [I have not got time to explain that in this devotional but please read these passages or the Life In Christ series on the Eternity DBS website.] "the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him." The ministry of the Holy Spirit is invisible to the world and to those who depend exclusively on its methods in religion. Even fine minds cannot find God by dint of academic ability alone. He must be revealed.

The Spirit does not dwell with the pride of the world but rather with the meek, humble and obedient disciples. "But you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you." The difference between those who Christ is revealed to - and those who He is not revealed to is obedience, the obedience of faith and love. "Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, Lord, how is it that You will reveal Yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves Me, he will keep My Word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My Words, and the Word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."

God is responsive to us. If we love His Son and keep His commandments He will love us and come to us and dwell with us. There is a consistent, abiding love of God that rests upon the lives of those with a holy life. There is a sense of dwelling with God about their person. They are not "hither and yon" in their obedience but have a deep steady walk with God and are rewarded by a profound and personal sense of His love and of His residence with them and in them.

Earlier I mentioned the passage about the Spirit convicting of "sin, righteousness and judgment" a frequently heard and often mis-applied passage in Christian circles. The Spirit convicts "the world" of such things! (John 16:8) Not the obedient believer. Rather the Holy Spirit pours the love of God out into our hearts (Romans 5:1-5) that we may be strengthened in the inner man, know the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God! (Ephesians 3:14-21) The Father and the Son come into our lives to love us and dwell with us! And they do so via the Holy Spirit! Thus the primary spiritual experience of the Christian should not be guilt - it should be overwhelming love!

We are intimately and organically connected with Christ! "*Because I live, you shall live also. At that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*" *We die with Christ, and rise with Christ, and live with Christ, and have ascended with Christ and we even are seated with Him in heavenly realms. (Romans 6:1-11, Ephesians 2:6,7)* As we saw yesterday with the "bottle in the ocean" analogy, we are in Christ and Christ is in us, and

Christ is in the Father. We are awash with God and with His love. His life is our life, and because He lives - we shall also live. The fact that ordinary humans such as you and I can be connected so closely to the mystery of the Godhead and the love of Christ is truly astonishing. I am in awe of the fact that God has chosen to love me so deeply and undeservedly. It is sheer grace!

Day 14 - John 15: 1-8

CONCERNING FRUITFULNESS

John 15:1-8 MKJV I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. (2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit. (3) Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. (5) I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (7) If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. (8) In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you shall be My disciples.

In these eight verses Jesus covers the secret of a fruitful spiritual life. We find the fruitful life is the result of in interaction where God responds to His Creation and His Creation responds to the life of Christ within it. Jesus is the Vine, the Life, the Source and we are the branches that flow from that life and which are filled by that life. Those branches have a choice about what to do with the (spiritual) life within them. Before we proceed a quick correction from the Greek in verse 2 "he takes away" should be "he lifts up" or "he lifts away" as in a vinedresser lifting a branch up, tying it back and making sure it is not in the mud. It implies corrective action, not removal from the vine.

All truly born-again believers have the life of Christ dwelling within them in the form of a "new man", a new nature that is from God and which is "born of God" through the action of the Word of the gospel on the spirit of the believer.
(see <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/innrmn1.htm>) *1 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10*

This new creation is born through the word of God and sustained through the word of God. This is reflected in the above verses:

"Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you."

"If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you." The four responses in this parable - no fruit, some fruit, much fruit, failing to abide are somewhat similar to the four responses in the parable of the four soils (none, shallow, fruitless and abundant).

Lets try and do a chart if email formatting permits:

VINE - GOD

No fruit - Corrective action

Some fruit - Pruning

Much fruit - Pruning

Does not abide - Taken away and burned

The last category is the "dry" and not even thirsty, shriveled up, lifeless pew-warmers, the dead wood of the church. Despite hearing the sermons and testimonies spiritual life has been unable to make any headway within them. They have cast aside the grace of God and in turn will be cast aside themselves.

The rest of us God is busy correcting and pruning and making productive. God wants His life within us to turn out productive in good works. As someone said "There are two parts to being a Christian, one part is believing it, the other part is behaving it." If we have His life within us - we have at least started believing it. Now God wants us living it and behaving it as well. So God disciplines us as sons (*Hebrews 12*) and may even "break us" at our point of strength like he did with Jacob. He wants us humble and malleable and contrite and teachable. Once this happens His Word can go to work within us - and then things get interesting! "If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you."

If we become humble and teachable and fruitful - then we are abiding in Christ and His Words sink deeply into us and abide in us. Then we start praying from the word planted in our souls. Our spirit and God's Spirit become "one spirit" (*1 Corinthians 6:17*) and what we ask for in prayer is heard on high! (*1 John 5:14 -15*). Our deepest fruitfulness comes from answered prayer. And answered prayer comes from abiding in Christ and having His Word abide in you! Therefore serious, deep soul-touching bible study on a daily basis is essential, not optional, nor just recommended, but essential! We have to love the Word and take it deep within us. Tonight someone commented to my wife "You married a concordance!" That is because I take the Word seriously. It is a feat to my soul. I say this not to boast but to say that all Christians should know their Bibles and love the Word and have it dwell within them for it is healing and life and fruitfulness and joy. Above all it forms us into Christ and gives us the mind of Christ to think the thoughts of Christ and pray the prayers of Christ, the "whatever you ask for" prayers that move Heaven and earth.

A couple of days ago I was praying about my ministry which involves establishing Internet cafes in unreached people groups and staffing them with local missionaries as outreach points. I needed 546 computers and had "no time" in which to find them. I also needed some funds for another project. As I had my quiet time that day God said for me to pray for the computers and to call them into being and to command them by faith. I did as God commanded and prayed, then sent out half a dozen emails, and prayed over those with Minda, then just five minutes afterwards the phone rang, and someone who had just got an email saw no problem with giving us the 546 computers. The money for the other project came in as well! I yelled Yeehah! Praise the Lord! And danced around the house. God is good, and when you pray according to His Word, for the things of the Kingdom - He surely answers!

Day 15 - John 15: 9-16

SELF SACRIFICE

John 15:9-16 MKJV As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; continue in My love. (10) If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (11) I have spoken these things to you so that My joy might remain in you and your joy might be full. (12) This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (13) No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (14) You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. (15) No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. (16) You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you.

Jesus calls the eleven His friends, says that He loves them and wants their joy to be full, that He makes known "all things" to them, will lay down His life for them, and has chosen them and ordained them to be fruitful and will answer their prayers and give things to them.

This is sheer grace. This is not-law and they and no-longer-called-servants! It is the opposite of the Christian treadmill of "being good so that God will answer my prayers and make my ministry fruitful". When did Jesus ask the disciples "to be good"? Did He ever say "Peter and John you were very good today so I will let you do some miracles?" and when the epileptic was not cured did Jesus say "He was not cured because you were not holy enough and good enough, if you had not eaten that chocolate bar you could have done this"? Or did Jesus say "because of your lack of faith?" You see the New Testament is a "faith to faith" exercise not a "being very good" exercise. The being "very good" bit is taken care of when we are imputed the righteousness of Christ when we are saved. From that moment on we are Ok (justified) before God and are acceptable citizens of heaven. From that moment on the love of God is poured out in our hearts, because from that moment on God sees us as fully lovable.

Jesus never told His disciples "you are simply not holy enough, get your act together". Jesus never said "James you are my friend because you tithe, and wash your hands, and never say swear words." His simple demand, repeated in all the gospels, is that they 'believe'. When they fully believe Him, then they will fully obey Him. But the believing is what establishes the spiritual connection that enables the fruitfulness, enables the miracles, enables the answered prayers and enables them to obey His commands and in particular to love one another with self-sacrificing agape love in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are many very committed "good" Christians with desperately unfruitful ministries, and often with very little real sense of being fully loved by God for who they are. Trying to be good does not work a single miracle or cast out the tiniest of demons or fill your heart with love - but faith will. As Paul says:

Galatians 3:1-5 MKJV O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified? (2) This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it is even in vain? (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

Let's go back to the long list of things that Jesus says He will do for His disciples - call them friends, die for them, love them, make their joy full, answer their prayers etc. YOU CANNOT EARN ANY OF THAT! I did not "earn" the love of my wife or my friends, and I do not earn the love of Jesus either. It is given, in abundance to "those who believe". Lets look further at this list and ask "How would you feel if all these things came true for you?" and "What picture does it paint?" To me it paints a picture of joyful, happy, fruitful, loved disciples with great ministries and astounding answers to prayer! That is what Jesus wants for all His friends! Jesus wants us living a faith-filled, joyous, abounding Christian life not a legalistic, miserable, anxiety-filled treadmill existence of religious fear. Jesus wants us happy in Him and comfortable with His companionship and friendship and love.

In fact Jesus not only calls us friends, He also calls us brothers, because we are joined with Him in sanctification and share His goodness and holiness:

Hebrews 2:11-12 MKJV For both He who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, (12) saying, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."

Now how on earth can we "be good enough" to earn the status of being a brother of the Son of God? The answer is we simply cannot do so. We gain that family status by the new birth; it is sheer grace!

Now Jesus does issue a command to them: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (13) No one has greater love than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. (14) You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." This is the command to live by self-sacrificing agape love. As a command it is death to the flesh. The flesh may be religious and may even fast twice a week, but it cannot love with true agape love. The flesh will not go to the cross for another. The flesh will not pick up the cross daily or love enemies.

This command to love as Jesus loved is ONLY possible in the Spirit, by faith in Jesus Christ, by living from His indwelling resurrection power. If we do this then all requirements of goodness and holiness etc. are taken care of in one fell swoop. We need to forget about the rules and instead just focus on having the kind of faith that makes us able to truly love others as Christ has loved us. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that all other religious exercises are as nothing compared to that of agape love. In fact agape love, the Jesus kind of love, not moving mountains or tongues or miracles, is the true sign that you have the life of God welling up within you. (*1 Corinthians 13:1-3*)

Jesus is calling you out from under the law to life as a believer in God! It is as we believe in Him that His life flows within us, and this life of God within us works miracles, and loves

others. I do not mean doctrinal faith, such as believing a concept or precept. But a personal trust faith that believes in a person and trusts what they say. It is establishing a personal connection with the Savior. From this trusting personal connection, we obey His commands and abide in His love.

Lets ask again "What picture is Jesus painting for His disciples in these eight verses in John 15:9-16?"

These are serious verses, uttered in a holy hour; they are the truth. The truth Jesus is telling us is about friendship not servitude, laying down His own life - not making heavy religious demands, the fullness of joy - not the heaviness of tradition, the direct spiritual knowledge of all things - not obscure texts and dogmas. Jesus is painting a picture of His light and easy yoke, of fruitfulness and joy and of answered prayer. And He keeps using the words "abide" and "remain" to indicate this is supposed to be a permanent gracious state of affairs and that we can simply remain in God's love all the time and remain in God's joy all the time - by living in agape love. And the joy is all the time - and "full"!

These verses should tell us that there is much wrong with joyless servitude to a demanding God. That is human religion not Jesus faith! It is powerless and miserable. Please reject that teaching and its power over you and discover the teaching of the gospels instead.

Day 16 - John 15: 17

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

John 15:17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

All of the commandments of Jesus are summed up in this one command "love one another". In today's bible study I want to dig deep into what this command means and why it is both so essential and so challenging.

Love is the nature of God (1 John 4:8) so when we love we are showing the nature of God. If we are to be in the image and glory of God we will be loving. To the extent that we are not loving, we fall short of the image of God and of true Christ-likeness. The goal of the Christian life is not evangelism and its not getting to heaven. They were the goals of the Pharisees! (Now evangelism is important, but not ultimate). Nowhere does Scripture indicate that we will be judged by how many converts we have made or churches we have planted - though that is good and worthy. Everywhere the Scriptures tell us that the goal is love and the commandment and standard is love. It is only fair that we are judged according to the commands we are given and the one great command, that sums up all others is this: "love one another" (Romans 13:8) And the true test of how spiritual we are is not bible knowledge or tongues or prophecy or great faith - but agape love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The fact that we turn up at a worship service once a week or read our bibles is insufficient, Christianity is not about how faithfully we fulfill certain rituals but is about how we fulfill the commands of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus puts it this way:

Matthew 7:19-23 MKJV Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. (21) Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

Lawless, selfish preachers will end up condemned by Jesus and cast into the fire. Thus spiritual performance - even at miraculous levels, is insufficient. Instead the Christian must live with the righteousness of Christ reflected in actions of agape love. The New Testament demand for agape love is at the same time a demand for the Spirit-filled life.

Agape love depends on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. To express God's nature - we need God inside us doing the work. Without the Holy Spirit love tends to be inconsistent, misguided, weak or sentimental. Without the Holy Spirit we search for some other command to substitute for the command to love - tithing, prayer, bible reading, witnessing, church attendance or theological correctness. We want a way to please God in our own strength. But none of these things are any good without love and love requires the power of God.

I am about to set off on a ministry trip to the Philippines. This will require great patience with airlines, Customs, immigration and so forth. I know I can only show agape love to these folk by the power of God - otherwise I will be rather irritable. I am not patient "by nature" but I can be patient "by grace".

In countless situations from marriage to raising children, to working with others we need to be able to love others in the power of the Holy Spirit - because our own strength and personal qualities are insufficient. The command to love tests every part of our Christian character to breaking point and beyond.

I am greatly concerned that we are substituting Christian culture for Christian righteousness so that if we go to see The Passion, listen to gospel music, watch Christian TV and have a Jesus Saves bumper sticker we are OK. Where did self-sacrificing love get lost in all that? Agape love has become lost because the "one-another" bit of the command has become lost, because we no longer live in anything like true Christian community. We can hardly love the empty air! We cannot love "one-another" if to all practical intents and purposes there is no "one-another".

And when we do live in community, such as at a residential bible college, we find it highly stressful.

We are matured through loving as well as through knowing - "speaking the truth in love we grow up in all things into Him". (Ephesians 4:15) Christians should BOTH know the Scriptures and be excellent in love. No one is matured as a spectator in a theater. We need

to interact with one another and be stretched by one another so we can grow in our ability to love.

Jesus keeps emphasizing agape love because it is the living center of the Christian life. If we get that right we get everything right. It is also the very hardest thing to get right. Love is an immense spiritual struggle that involves complete death to self and to all selfishness and materialism. Persons become paramount and precious. People go from being a means to an end, a volunteer in the ministry for instance, to being wonderfully precious sons and daughters of God that we are to die for and give this world's goods for. (1 John 3:16-18)

Why not stop and pray that the Lord Jesus will teach and instruct you to love others in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Day 17 - John 15: 18-25

INSTRUCTION TO THE FAITHFUL

John 15:18-25 MKJV If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My saying, they will also keep yours. (21) But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. (23) He who hates Me hates My Father also. (24) If I had not done among them the works which no other did, they would not have had sin. But now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father. (25) But that the Word might be fulfilled that is written in their Law, "They hated Me without a cause."

"They hated me without a cause." Many of God's servants are hated without a justifiable cause. Paul was hated, beaten and imprisoned for casting out a demon in Acts 16! Peter and John were beaten for healing a lame man! Christians are not persecuted and killed for being liars or thieves or murderers - but because they are Christ's!

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own." Worldly compromisers avoid persecution by joining the demonic world system that is opposed to God. They water down the gospel and emphasize the powerless aspects of merely human religion. If a clergyman is openly gay or denies the resurrection, he or she is lauded as progressive. The world loves its own man-made faith. But the churches that preach it are dead and dying. The growing churches are those that preach the Scriptures and which abound in the apostolic faith.

"But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." We are aliens and strangers on the earth, God has chosen us out of the world and we do not belong to it any more. *"Galatians 6:14 MKJV But may it never be for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified*

to me, and I to the world. "There is this radical break between Christians and the world system of pomp and pride and boasting and social status. We have come out of the world and no longer play by those rules any more. Our election is obvious, we are God's and by obvious implication, they are not.

"Remember the word that I said to you, the servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." The world system, the "cosmos", hated Jesus before it hated the apostles. It is opposed to Jesus and is therefore opposed to any that are like Him. To be a Spirit-filled, bible-believing, born-again Christian who works the works of God is to be in direct opposition to the established social order. The social order will say things such as "there should be a separation of Church and State." indicating that the biblical, apostolic Christian faith is not welcome in the halls of power. Why? Because Christianity pricks consciences and exposes injustice and above all because it says that they have not "made it" until they find Christ and that their system grants no lasting honors and that all lasting honors are awarded by God alone.

Notice Jesus does not say "they might persecute you" but "they will persecute you". Some form of persecution is practically a guaranteed certainty. *"2 Timothy 3:12 MKJV Yea, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* This will be especially true in the end times that are fast approaching. It is a daily truth for the 260,000 Christians that are martyred for their faith each year. (Source: World Christian Encyclopedia).

"If they have kept My saying, they will also keep yours." The converse is also true - the sheep know the voice of the Master even when it is coming from the humblest of pastors. People will follow their pastors as they would follow Christ - and that is a very great honor! There will be some that listen to the gospel, and some that want to follow Christ, and we must lead them to good pastures and feed them with the living Word. We cannot let criticism deter us from speaking the truth they need to hear, they have not come to us to hear the world, but Christ. They can hear the world's preaching at any time; from us they must hear Jesus.

The "world" is not just a political or social system it is a spiritual system: *"1 Corinthians 2:12 MKJV (12) But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God."* The world has its human religion, commandments and taboos:

Colossians 2:20-23 MKJV (20) If then you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to its ordinances: (21) touch not, taste not, handle not; (22) which things are all for corruption in the using, according to the commands and doctrines of men? (23) These things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and humility, and unsparing severity of the body, but are not of any value for the satisfying of the flesh.

And this spiritual system is evil :

"Galatians 1:4 MKJV who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father," and is controlled by the Devil:

1 John 5:19 ISV We know that we are from God and that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one. Thus to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God:

James 4:4 ISV You adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility with God? So whoever wants to be a friend of this world is an enemy of God.

But we overcome the world by having faith in Jesus as the Son of God:

1 John 5:4-5 ISV because everyone who is born from God has overcome the world. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world. (5) Who overcomes the world? Is it not the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? We must leave the world's value system far behind:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ISV (14) Stop becoming unevenly yoked with unbelievers. What partnership can righteousness have with lawlessness? What fellowship can light have with darkness? (15) What harmony exists between Christ and Beliar, or what do a believer and an unbeliever have in common? (16) What agreement can a temple of God make with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said: "I will live and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people." (17) Therefore, "Get away from them and separate yourselves from them," declares the Lord, "and don't touch anything unclean. Then I will welcome you. (18) I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters," declares the Lord Almighty.

Thus, there will always be a tremendous tension between the true Christian and the world system and this tension is not easily resolved. For some they may have to join a monastery to consecrate themselves utterly to God, others will manage an inner separation in the midst of secular life. But we cannot compromise and we cannot wimp out. Christ, not the culture, is the judge.

Day 18 - John 15: 26-27

GOD'S HELPER

John 15:26-27 ASV But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me: (27) and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

Matthew Henry tells us that these two verses tell us more about the Holy Spirit in a short space than any other verses in Scripture! They tell us that:

1. For the apostles the Holy Spirit is primarily a comforter.
2. That in nature the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of Truth.
3. That the Holy Spirit bears witness of Christ and empowers them to also bear witness of Christ.
4. That the Spirit's arrival was yet future to this point - that by implication He would come after the cross.
5. That the Holy Spirit would be sent by Jesus.
6. That the Holy Spirit would proceed from the Father.
7. That the Holy Spirit is a definite divine person that can be referred to as being of the masculine gender.

In fact dispute over these verses and the Nicene Creed (whether the Holy Spirit proceed "from the Father and the Son" (Roman Catholic), or "from the Father by the Son" (Orthodox churches) led to the first major split in Christendom.

Point 1 - The Holy Spirit is primarily a Comforter a "parakletos" , one coming alongside the believer, strengthening them in the inner man (*Ephesians 3:14-21*) and pouring His love into their hearts amidst trials and tribulations (*Romans 5:1-5*) and revealing to them all that God has prepared for those who love Him, things that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the mind of man (*1 Corinthians 2:9-16*) and as such He is our teacher and guide (*1 John 2:20,27*) and instructs in all things concerning Christ (*John 14:26*) and in particular teaches us how to pray in the Spirit (*Romans 8:26*).

One of the primary tasks of the Holy Spirit is to love us so much we become prayerful and joyful in Christ and full of peace and love and patience and the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us so that our joy may be made full and that we may be living examples of anointed humanity.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is the comforting presence of divine love and wisdom to strengthen, encourage and mature the believer in Christ. If this results in tongues, prophecy or miracles; then well and good. But these are secondary to the work of comforting the saints in the inner man.

Point 2 - The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of Truth". People who claim the anointing and then tell lies or ask for money have the wrong anointing! The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and into both truthful behavior and truthful words. Truly anointed people do not compromise with darkness or commit crimes or cheat others. When the anointing is strong such as it was during the Jerusalem revival in Acts 2-6, then those who "lie to the Spirit" are carried out dead! The Holy Spirit is very serious about the Truth because that is a very deep part of His nature for He is the Spirit of Truth. Truly spiritual people are honest and plain speaking just as Jesus, and all the apostles were.

Point 3 - The Holy Spirit bears witness of Christ and causes other to bear witness to Him also. *"Acts 1:8 ASV But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

This is not just the apostles but the 120 in the upper room who glorified God in public when the Spirit came upon them and the countless Christians since who have found the ability to witness comes from the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who helps them to testify of Christ. The Holy Spirit can bear witness because He has been with Christ, since all eternity, as part of the Trinity, and He can speak of Christ to people in dreams and visions and quite a few have been converted in this way. The Spirit also testifies to Christ through the God-breathed Scriptures and works in concert with His Word to bring millions to faith. As well as using dreams, visions, and the Scriptures the Holy Spirit can also use us believers as His witnesses! And to be used as a witness we have to be 'with Jesus' (verse 27) and know Him deeply so we can also testify of Him.

Point 4 - The Holy Spirit was future to this point and would arrive after the cross. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father." All the disciples knew up until this point was external to them, all the demons they had cast out and people healed on their mission trips such as when the twelve and the 72 were sent out, all the teaching and parables and learning, had been without the full "Pentecostal" power of the Holy Spirit who was yet to come. The precise spiritual state of the eleven believing apostles is hard to determine at this point - but we can definitely say that they had not yet received the power from on high - though they had seen and done a great deal of ministry and fervently believed in Jesus. There are deeper and deeper anointing of God and a great blessing known as the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" that brings great boldness and power to witness. All Christians receive the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit at conversion but His fire and His coming upon them is sometimes a second event.

If you lack boldness and the power to witness ask God to baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit. (see <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/baptj.htm>)

Point 5 - Jesus sends The Holy Spirit. Now who can send God anywhere but God alone? If Jesus can direct and send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, that hovered over the work of Creation, if Jesus can send the Spirit anywhere - then He is clearly and absolutely God. Neither you nor I nor any prophet or apostle of old can send the Spirit anywhere! Let alone from the side of the Father. Jesus is clearly claiming direct access to God the Father and authority over the Holy Spirit. That makes Jesus God. Now Jesus sends the Spirit at a time and a place of His choosing "in Jerusalem... not many days from now" (*Acts 1:4,5*) and not in response to any invocation, act of worship or special ceremony. You may be able to call up a ghost or a demon but you cannot call up God the Holy Spirit! He is not at the beck and call of anyone! He arrives only when Jesus sovereignly sends him. The Holy Spirit is sent by God; not called down by man.

There is no ceremony, no formula, no magic words anywhere in the New Testament that will ensure that the Holy Spirit will turn up. And when He does turn up it might be in an upper room or in the home of a centurion and not in the Temple.

"Acts 2:33 MKJV Therefore being exalted to the right of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear."

Point 6 - The Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father" and is the Father's love sent into the Christian heart so that we cry "Abba, Father". *"Galatians 4:6 MKJV And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."* The Holy Spirit is "from the Father" and brings us into the Father-son relationship so He is also literally called "the spirit of sonship" or adoption. *Romans 8:14-16 MKJV For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (15) For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father! (16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.* The Holy Spirit also connects us back to the Father giving us direct spiritual access to Him! *Ephesians 2:18 MKJV For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*

Point 7 - The Holy Spirit is a definite divine person who Jesus consciously refers to as "He" - and the construction here in the Greek is deliberate and awkward and avoids the easier use of the neuter gender. The Holy Spirit is not a pagan force or power or "like electricity" nor is He a "vibration" or emanation, rather He is a person who can be grieved, lied to, and resisted and who gets jealous when saints become worldly. (see <http://www.aibi.ph/beq/chapters 4,5,6 and 8>) The Holy Spirit is a divine person who brings to us the personal qualities of God such as love, joy, peace and patience and forms the person of Christ within us. The Holy Spirit is the personality and power of God, resident within human personality, with the power to change it. The Holy Spirit is thus not just a power that possesses us but a Person who loves and comforts us, who makes us wise and teaches us, who makes us sons of God, and who transforms us into Christ-like human beings.

Day 19 - John 16:1-4

PERSECUTION

John 16:1-4 MKJV I have spoken these things to you so that you should not be offended. (2) They shall put you out of the synagogue. But an hour is coming that everyone who kills you will think that he bears God service. (3) And they will do these things to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. (4) But I have told you these things so that when the hour shall come you may remember that I told you of them. And I did not say these things to you at the beginning because I was with you.

The religious who think they bear God service - will throw the apostles out of the synagogue and even kill them. And the disciples are not to be offended, stumbled or surprised! The Spirit-filled Christian is an offense to the carnal religionist or the worldly system of official dogma. No system can encompass the Spirit, which like the wind, "blows where it will".

It is not atheists, but self-proclaimed religious experts, that killed the apostles and crucified Christ. And as Jesus said they "have not known the Father or Me". They only knew their dogma, their rules and their power. Now we need truth, and the essential doctrines of the faith are not up for grabs, indeed doctrine is central to the Christian life. But doctrine cannot be a substitute for the Christian life. If we only have doctrine - and do not personally know God, then we can easily become an enemy of true grace.

Systems react to perpetuate themselves and even religious systems can be violent in their antagonism to change. And when the change means the system will come to an end and the Temple be torn down and the priests out of a job and a New Covenant enacted in which they have no place (see Hebrews 9 & 10) then the reactions are very violent indeed!

Jesus wanted the apostles to keep on going even in the face of puzzling, irrational and lethal opposition. Jesus prepared them to face a less than perfect world. A world of evil responses to grace. A world where the one organization that had nurtured their childhood faith - the synagogue, would throw them out and hate them.

Many Christians find themselves rejected by religious systems. One denomination in Australia, a rather liberal one, once refused to ordain me on two grounds (a) I was too evangelical and (b) I was a bible teacher and "bible-teaching has nothing to do with the ministry of the Word", (their exact statement).

That denomination is now being torn apart by division.

We must remain faithful to Jesus even if it means that our church throws us out. Our loyalty is not to a system but to the Person we know and love who is our Savior. Now there are some excellent churches, and many where we can be fully Christ's. But if the day comes when a choice between following Christ and belonging to a church must be made, we should know that many have gone before us, and not be stumbled, and choose Christ, without bitterness toward the church, and keep our love of God. For that is what Jesus would want.

Day 20 - John 16:5-7

BUT NOW I GO

John 16:5-7 MKJV But now I go to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, Where do You go? (6) But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. (7) But I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I depart, I will send Him to you.

"But now I go to Him who sent Me" - Jesus is about to die, be raised from the dead, and then ascend into Heaven to take His place at the right hand of God. Peter describes this process of exaltation and sending in his sermon during Pentecost:

Acts 2:32-36 MKJV God raised up this Jesus, of which we all are witnesses. (33) Therefore being exalted to the right of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear. (34) For David has not ascended into the heavens, but he says himself, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand (35) until I place Your enemies as a footstool to Your feet." (36) Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Thus "now I go to Him who sent me" was a process - which stretched from Easter to Pentecost, and would take fifty days from the cross to the arrival of the Comforter. For the Holy Spirit to be poured out three main things had to happen:

Firstly, a sacrifice has to be made for sin and the "sin problem" dealt with, so that we can be declared holy before God and the Spirit of Holiness can come to dwell in us. Secondly, that sacrifice had to be accepted and Jesus declared the Son of God by the Resurrection. Thirdly, the spiritual world has to be "taken captive" during the ascension to the right hand of God. (*Ephesians chapter 4, Colossians chapter 2*)

Thus with Satan disarmed, the believers cleansed and the opposing spirit-world and heavenly realms "taken captive" the Holy Spirit and His gifts could be poured out. This is

clearly stated in *Ephesians 4:7-12*: *But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (9) (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) (11) And truly He gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Jesus continues: "For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you." Unless Jesus had died on the cross, then been resurrected and ascended into Heaven – then the Comforter would not have come. The sacrifice of Christ was an absolute prerequisite for Pentecost. God would not send His Holy Spirit into unclean hearts or into a world still entirely under Satan's dominion. God follows certain principles in how He sends His Spirit. Grace still has its laws.

This speaks volumes to those of us who seek revival. First - the cross and then Pentecost. First must come repentance and cleansing with the Word and humility and the seeking of grace through faith and desiring the washing of the blood of Christ. God dwells with the penitent and lowly of heart, not with the proud, the casual, or those who are flippant about grace!

Jesus is still at the right hand of the Father and He is still saying "I will send Him (the Comforter) to you". He still sends His Spirit to His Church and to those who believe and the Holy Spirit, who is eternal and unchanging, has not lost His power! Therefore we must seek the outpouring of the Spirit and His power for ministry - particularly to make us witnesses throughout the world.

And like the disciples we have to lose the "earthly Jesus" (Jesus as merely a historical figure) to gain the Spirit. The nice, kind Jesus of Sunday School has to go to the cross and be replaced in our awareness with the resurrected Christ - "who was dead and who is alive forevermore." (Revelation 1:18) That is why Paul writes:
2 Corinthians 5:16 For this reason, from this time forward we have knowledge of no man after the flesh: even if we have had knowledge of Christ after the flesh, we have no longer any such knowledge.

We have to know Christ "in the Spirit" as the One who sits at the right hand of the Father, as the Lamb of God, as the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus. This must be our central reality. It must subsume the historical Christ with the beard and sandals Just as Jesus subsumed His earthly identity in His resurrection body. The Christ of Colossians is a "cosmic co-Creator" and that is how we must think of Jesus now. It is almost impossible to think of a man with beard and sandals dwelling within us personally. The interior Christ is the resurrected Christ and if we are to know Christ in us, and His resurrection power, we must know Him as He now is, not as He once was.

When Paul prays for the Ephesians it is not for the knowledge of a historical figure he prays but for knowledge of a living spiritual reality of great power and authority:
Ephesians 1:17-21 MKJV that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,

may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, (18) the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, (19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us, the ones believing according to the working of His mighty strength (20) which He worked in Christ in raising Him from the dead, and He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, (21) far above all principality and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this world, but also in the coming age.

To sum up - revival comes to penitent, cross-embracing believers, who grasp the power and majesty of the ascended Lord Jesus and His desire to send the Holy Spirit upon us in power.

Day 21 - John 16: 8-11

THE ONE WHO CONVICTS THE WORLD

John 16:8-11 MKJV And when that One comes, He will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. (9) Concerning sin, because they do not believe on Me; (10) concerning righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; (11) concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The Holy Spirit is a Comforter to the disciples and a Convicter of the world. When a revival occurs the saints are comforted and blessed and the sinners convicted and disturbed. The Holy Spirit is holy and the entrance of holiness into common life is both startling and convicting. When the Holy Spirit comes in power people see that their unbelief is sin, that Christ is perfect righteousness and that the world system and its ruler are judged and must be fled from in holy terror.

During revival there is an overpowering sense of being rescued from "an evil and perverse generation", that the rottenness of the world has been exposed to the eyes of God and that "judgment is nigh" to use an old-fashioned phrase. To follow this thought a bit further what would a might revival in the "sin city" of Las Vegas look like? Firstly, people would stop in their tracks and realize that they have not believed in God. They would repent of their unbelief and turn from the bars to the churches. Bible colleges would soon outnumber brothels. Secondly, there would be a deep sense that Christ, (not Hugh Hefner and his like) was the true model person and that the true and worthy lifestyle was one of holy love. There would be deep changes in life-style as people became righteous and understood what righteousness was. Thirdly, there would be a sense that Vegas and its worldly system and all its "princes and palaces" was under judgment and would soon pass away.

Therefore the key to social transformation is a mighty Holy Spirit revival that affects not just the church but the world. Such revivals have always come in response to believing prayer. (For a great article on "Praying the Price Of Revival" by Dr. Stuart Robinson go to: <http://www.aibi.ph/prayer/payprice.htm>)

The Holy Spirit is God, and as God is present in all places at all times, and is not restricted to church on Sunday mornings. The Holy Spirit can, and sometimes does, convict entire cities and nations. We need to have this larger vision of God the Holy Spirit, who can move in entire communities and places and who moves in social structures as well as in religious structures. In one of my theological articles I wrote:

In *Isaiah 62:10-12* quoted above salvation is constantly described in terms of communities "daughter of Zion" "the peoples" "the Holy People" "the Redeemed of the Lord" "a City Not Forsaken". These communities are just as "saved" as each individual in them. The communities experience peace (*Psalms 122:6*), joy (*Isaiah 65:18*), prosperity (*Zechariah 1:17*) and health (*Isaiah 65:20-23*). They know the favour of God and are "witnesses" (*Isaiah 43:10-12*). The Holy Spirit dwells in their midst and sanctifies the temple (*Ezekiel 43:5-7*), the city (*Zechariah 12:10*) and the nation (*Ezekiel 39:29*) through conviction and purging (*Isaiah 4:4*) and the production of the fruits of the Spirit in the community (*Isaiah 32:15-18, 61:3*). The nation can grieve the Holy Spirit (*Isaiah 63:10*) which is "within them" (*Isaiah 63:11*) and gives them rest (*Isaiah 63:14*). Ezekiel talks of a "new spirit" being given to the house of Israel (*Ezekiel 11:19,20, 18:31, 36:26-28*) that results in national prosperity. (*Ezekiel 36:26-30 NKJV*) The nation is a collection of individuals who make decisions about God but it is also an entity in its own right before God. The Spirit can be poured out on the nation as a whole. (*Ezekiel 39:29 NKJV*) 'And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD." (see <http://www.aibi.ph/urban/savegrps.htm>)

Thus the Holy Spirit can convict "the world" and its unbelieving social structures of the truth of the gospel and of the need to repent of sin. The Holy Spirit is more than just a healing religious presence. As the Spirit of God He also acts in the political and social arenas and is transformational across entire communities.

The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of prophecy and when prophets address the world they take up His three-fold theme.

1. You are deep in unbelief and that is sin. (*John 16:9*)
2. Jesus is the model for humanity and the true standard of righteousness. (*John 16:10*)
3. God had judged the world and Satan, its prince and faces sure doom. (*John 16:11*)

In other words - you must believe, in Jesus, or otherwise perish.

Thus the Spirit does not dialogue with the world or negotiate with its terms. The Spirit confronts the world and convicts it - and the prophetic voice is not soothing at all. We cannot bring the world to its knees in repentance without the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Reason alone is a futile weapon against the stubbornness of sin. We must seek the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, not just in our worship services but also throughout our entire communities. When pastors and Christian leaders and community elders band together in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to come into their community and change it then revival can break forth in mighty ways (as the work of Ed Silvano in Resistencia, Argentina has shown.)

Day 22 - John 16:12-15

THE INSTRUCTOR

John 16: 12-15 ISV "I still have a lot to say to you, but you cannot bear it now. (13) Yet when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own accord, but will speak whatever he hears and will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (15) All that the Father has is mine. That is why I said, 'He will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

"I still have a lot to say to you.." but no more time to say it - and they could not bear to hear it if He did - because their hearts were filled with sorrow. So when was Jesus going to say it? After the resurrection - during those mysterious forty days, and later, through His Spirit He would send upon them. Jesus continues to speak to His disciples and His Church and has much to say to us.

The One who speaks what Jesus wants to say to us is the Holy Spirit. "he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own accord, but will speak whatever he hears and will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in ways we can understand and declares to us "the things that are to come" that is the truths that would be revealed after Jesus' resurrection such as the nature of the Church, the role of Jewish diet and practices, the salvation of the Gentiles, salvation by faith alone, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and many other truths that only fully unfolded after Jesus had ascended into Heaven. The seeds of these truths can sometimes be found in the Old Testament or the teachings of Jesus, but their full unveiling was due to the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit does not only instruct us in matters of doctrine but also in matters of ministry:
Act 8:29 The Spirit said to Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay close to it."
Acts 10:19-20 ISV Peter was still thinking about the vision when the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you. (20) Get up, go downstairs, and don't hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."
Act 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me to do the work for which I called them."

Thus part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to continue Jesus' conversation with us so that Ananias could say:

Acts 9:10-12,17 ISV Now in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Here I am, Lord." (11) The Lord said to him, "Get up, go to the street called Straight, and in the home of Judas look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. At this very moment he is praying. (12) He has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so he would see again."

... So Ananias left and went to that house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were traveling, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Ananias receives explicit instructions for ministry in a vision of Jesus and later acknowledges to Saul that Jesus had sent him - and why. The conversation with Jesus continues via spiritual means!

Thus, from time to time, we are to expect to hear clearly, personally and directly from God the Holy Spirit to clarify doctrine or to instruct us in the work of God. The Holy Spirit speaks to us that which Jesus would say to us if He were sitting beside us. When the Holy Spirit speaks it is clear to the person concerned and not in riddles. To Peter He says, "Look! Three men are looking for you. (20) Get up, go downstairs, and don't hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." This quiet ordinary instruction in a "plain English" (or Aramaic) sentence was to Phillip just as plain "Go up to the chariot" or to Ananias "go to the street called Straight". These are directions - in some cases street directions about where to go and what to do at that moment in time.

In none of these cases did the person concerned wonder whether or not it was God that was speaking. They simply knew in their own spirit that this was the Lord. The Holy Spirit can give us straightforward guidance about the work of God and instruct us in all things - even which house to visit and how to get there!

Some quick guidelines: (1) The Holy Spirit is holy and will never give an unrighteous, untrue or immoral suggestion. All "guidance" that is plainly contrary to God's moral law is misguidance. (2) The Holy Spirit gives us room to use our minds. We do not need guidance about which shoe to put on first and most ordinary daily decisions can be properly made by sanctified common sense. (3) The guidance of the Holy Spirit is often very plain and straightforward. While it may involve a vision the actual instruction itself "Go up to the chariot, etc." is never bafflingly mystical. (4) The instruction is nearly always a matter of immediate concern about things directly at hand - and rarely concerns distant future events. The instructions are for that place and time "Set apart for me Paul and Silas for the work to which I have called them..'. Thus the true voice of the Holy Spirit is plain, clear, straightforward, timely and absolutely righteous.

Does this apply today? Let us answer a question with a question - Does God still speak to His household? Does Jesus still have things to say to His church? Does the Great Commission still needs specific instructions at key moments? Yes it does! It is the common testimony of thousands of Christian pastors and missionaries that from time to time Jesus still has "much more to say to you" and does so via the Holy Spirit. This may be in a healing and comforting word, a specific revelation, or an instruction that leads to a missionary breakthrough.

Jesus wants to reveal to us all the Father's goodness: "All that the Father has is mine. That is why I said, 'He will take what is mine and declare it to you.'" This is not revealed in a single bible study but by a lifetime of listening to God.

If you want to know more about how the Holy Spirit can speak to you just pray a prayer like this twice a day for a short while (say a week): "Lord Jesus, please continue your conversation with me and speak to me, clearly and unequivocally through the Holy Spirit."

Day 23 - John 16: 16-22

SORROW TURNED TO JOY

John 16:16-22 MKJV A little while and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father. (17) Then His disciples said to one another, What is this that He says to us, A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little and you will see Me? And, Because I go to the Father? (18) Therefore they said, What is this that He says, A little while? We do not know what He is saying. (19) Then Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and said to them, Do you seek answers with one another concerning this, because I said, A little while and you shall not see Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me? (20) Truly, truly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. (21) The woman has grief when she bears, because her hour has come. But when she brings forth the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of the joy that a man is born into the world. (22) And therefore you now have sorrow.

But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. The cross baffled the disciples. Jesus would vanish from their sight and their hopes as, within twelve hours of this Passover speech at the Last Supper, He would be tried and executed. Then a few days later He would rise from the dead. Death followed by resurrection, sorrow followed by joy. This is often the Christian path. And the confusion of the disciples is mirrored in the confusion of "Everyman" - the common Christian believer.

We have this idea that life should keep on going up, from blessing to blessings, whereas it actually proceeds "from faith to faith". When life suddenly becomes sorrowful, when tragedy strikes, when confusion and loss overcome us - we are astounded. And that is normal. That is one thing about the disciples - they were very real and honest and in many respects were just normal human beings. The betrayal by Judas, and the horrible death of their Master would be double blows to the heart - but in the end they would rejoice. Jesus plan for our lives is that in the end we will rejoice and that we will rejoice so greatly that all our sorrows will be forgotten. This is what He meant when He said:

"The woman has grief when she bears, because her hour has come. But when she brings forth the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of the joy that a man is born into the world. And therefore you now have sorrow. But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." The death of Jesus would seem permanent but Jesus says "I will see you again". Few tragedies are permanent - for we will see our loved ones in Christ again. Even our own death is not permanent - for we shall go to be with Christ and receive a spiritual body at the resurrection.

Believers have passed from death to life. Thus faith in Christ makes all tragedies temporary and ensures that joy will win in the end. Some human hurts are so deep that it does not seem possible that joy will win out in the end. But few grieves could be deeper than that of Mary at the cross. Yet she rejoiced in the end! An illness, a divorce, a terrible injustice or a

broken engagement can seem like a permanent and abiding sorrow but we must take even these to Jesus and ask Him to bring joy to us in the end.

It is possible to make an idol out our pain, to enshrine it within us, and to derive our meaning and sense of personhood from it and to make it the defining event or characteristic of our life.

By taking their pain seriously the person feels as if they are taking themselves seriously and thus conferring honor on their existence. Yet this enshrining of pain can become emotionally crippling as well as socially deleterious. The cure for this is true Christ-centered worship.

Lets briefly look at Psalm 73:

Psalms 73:1-28 CEV (A psalm by Asaph.) God is truly good to Israel, especially to everyone with a pure heart. (2) But I almost stumbled and fell, (3) because it made me jealous to see proud and evil people and to watch them prosper. (4) They never have to suffer, they stay healthy, (5) and they don't have troubles like everyone else. (6) Their pride is like a necklace, and they commit sin more often than they dress themselves. (7) Their eyes poke out with fat, and their minds are flooded with foolish thoughts. (8) They sneer and say cruel things, and because of their pride, they make violent threats. (9) They dare to speak against God and to order others around. (10) God will bring his people back, and they will drink the water he so freely gives. (11) Only evil people would say, "God Most High cannot know everything!" (12) Yet all goes well for them, and they live in peace. (13) What good did it do me to keep my thoughts pure and refuse to do wrong? (14) I am sick all day, and I am punished each morning. (15) If I had said evil things, I would not have been loyal to your people. (16) It was hard for me to understand all this! (17) Then I went to your temple, and there I understood what will happen to my enemies. (18) You will make them stumble, never to get up again. (19) They will be terrified, suddenly swept away and no longer there. (20) They will disappear, Lord, despised like a bad dream the morning after. (21) Once I was bitter and brokenhearted. (22) I was stupid and ignorant, and I treated you as a wild animal would. (23) But I never really left you, and you hold my right hand. (24) Your advice has been my guide, and later you will welcome me in glory. (25) In heaven I have only you, and on this earth you are all I want. (26) My body and mind may fail, but you are my strength and my choice forever. (27) Powerful LORD God, all who stay far from you will be lost, and you will destroy those who are unfaithful. (28) It is good for me to be near you. I choose you as my protector, and I will tell about your wonderful deeds.

The Psalm writer - Asaph was deeply wounded in heart and so full of pain at the injustice of life that he says: "Once I was bitter and brokenhearted. I was stupid and ignorant, and I treated you as a wild animal would." So deep was his pain that he almost stumbled and fell." But Asaph then goes to the Temple and suddenly realizes the fate of God's enemies and sees that they will be swept away and become "like a bad dream the morning after." Refocusing on God cured the pain of his heart! In the end, after complaining long and loud about God's unfairness Asaph gets a new perspective and writes: "It is good for me to be near you. I choose you as my protector, and I will tell about your wonderful deeds.

Life is sometimes sad and confusing but God has not planned for it to remain that way forever. He will turn our sorrow into joy. Meanwhile we can move out of many of our sorrows by moving the focus off ourselves and onto Christ in true Christ-centered worship.

Day 24 - John 16: 23-28

FULLNESS OF JOY

John 16:23-28 MKJV And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you. (24) Before now you have asked nothing in My name; ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. (25) I have spoken these things to you in parables, but the time is coming when I shall no more speak to you in parables, but I will show you plainly of the Father. (26) At that day you will ask in My name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you, (27) for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came out from God. (28) I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world.

Again I leave the world and go to the Father. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. - this is actually a command! Jesus is commanding us to take a course of action that will lead us to become totally happy. Jesus also says:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you."

Thus Jesus wants us to be joyful in all things and the method is - ask the Father and you shall receive! So why are not all Christians millionaires? Why do some remain un-healed? Why do many Christians still have frustrating jobs and relationships? Yet why do many experience amazing answers to prayer, daily supply of needs and see true miracles of healing? Why do some Christians often see prayers answered while other equally sincere Christians hardly ever see prayers answered?

I think the key is something called A World View - that is how we view reality. Jesus explained it this way: At that day you will ask in My name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came out from God. The Father loved the disciples because they saw reality a certain way and believed certain things about Jesus to be literally true.

Firstly, the disciples were loved by the Father because you have loved Me - that is because they loved Jesus and committed themselves to journey with Jesus. To listen to Him, walk with Him, talk to Him, travel with Him, go out on missions for Him and teach and obey His commandments. Love for Christ was central - real day-to-day love like love for a family member. Some Christians love Christ as a concept or an ideal or a social icon much as a fan of a rock star does. But this is not the same as loving the rock star personally and eating meals with him! Our love for Jesus has to go beyond warm feelings and religious notions to daily living in His Presence, and going to work for Him amidst the realities of life. And like normal love, we only love those who we believe love us. The disciples loved Jesus, in part, because they truly believed that He loved them first. Christians who get their prayers answered believe that Jesus loves them like a family member and live daily with Him and for Him as a result.

Secondly, the disciples were loved, and their prayers answered, because they believed that I came out from God. In other words the disciples believed that incarnation was possible. They had a down-to-earth God not just one that floated on a cloud Away up there

somewhere. God was immediate and with them in the person of Jesus Christ. The power of God was not just an abstract ideal but also a living reality. Heaven was contact-able and God actually sent His Son to us. The world-view of those who get their prayers answered is not more knowledgeable or theological than those who struggle. Rather it is centered on living out an adventure with Jesus who loves them.

People who trust God's love enough to launch out on that adventure have many prayers answered while those who hang back and Await and see generally have few prayers answered. It is the missionaries and evangelists and keen young bible college students, those who have accepted the risk, that see the glory of God. Thus when Jesus says, "Ask and you will receive" He is speaking to a bunch of His adventurers. These were disciples who had learned and heard and suffered and who were there with Him just prior to the cross. God was real to them in the face of Christ.

When God is real to you in the face of Christ and His calling and adventure is your delight and you believe that Heaven and Earth are connected and that God is doing stuff today then prayer will be second nature and exciting. If on the other hand your world-view is that Jesus is a concept and Heaven is distant and not connected with daily life then prayer will be a chore at best and a guilt-ridden struggle at worst. You have to decide to join the band of disciples and to risk all for Jesus - yet doing so because He has loved you first. If Jesus runs your life and you join His adventure, then, the Christian life is great fun and amazing! If however you run your life and Jesus is merely a spiritual power invoked to solve difficult situations, then you are committing idolatry and will be most miserable.

Prayer can be amazing or prayer can be backbreaking. You can delight in God's nearness and presence and answers - or you can groan in frustration. The secret is following Jesus, step by step, along the dusty road. Not just thinking about Jesus but actually living with Jesus today. When your world-view shifts and God moves out of the abstract into the concrete then your prayer life will change as a result. When you stop loving an idea or an ideal and start loving a person who loves you, then your prayer will become connected to Christ and be deep and resonant. When the Christian life is discovered as a 24/7 adventures not a one-hour ceremony, and then God will be with you at breakfast.

This is not a matter of being very good or moral. Jesus never says that our prayers depend on how good we are. Many strict living saints have unfulfilled prayer lives while some rather unusual saints see miracles (e.g., Gal 3:1-5). Its not a matter of being worthy, all believers are justified. It is a matter of loving and living with Jesus in an adventure of faith - often with a group of others.

Prayer is connecting Heaven with real life in an obedient adventure with God. Has Jesus come forth from Heaven for you?

Day 25 - John 16: 29-33

I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD

John 16:29-33 MKJV The disciples said to Him, Lo, now You speak plainly and speak no parable. (30) Now we know that You know all things and do not need that anyone should ask You. By this we believe that You have come forth from God. (31) Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? (32) Behold, the hour comes, yea, has now come, that you will be scattered, each man to his own things, and you will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (33) I have spoken these things to you so that you might have peace in Me. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

1 John 4:4 MKJV You are of God, little children, and you have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

1 John 5:4-5 MKJV For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

How can Christians overcome the cosmos? "Kosmos" is Greek for "world" as in the world system of principalities and powers. These evil powers hold the world in sin and unbelief. (*Ephesians 2:1-4*) We know we have broken their hold over us when we have come to truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God - because saving faith is something that they will use all their power to prevent. (*1 John 5:4,5* above).

We are able to overcome the grip of the principalities and powers because "He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world". (*1 John 4:4*) Christ in us is greater than Satan and can strengthen us to resist all temptations and thus lead us to ever-deepening faith and to life in Christ.

All this is predicated on the truth of Jesus' statement "I have overcome the world". Jesus lived a life that never gave an inch to the powers and principalities of darkness. Every temptation to avarice, to self-aggrandizement or to rule the world through doing a deal with the Devil (*Luke 4: 1-11*) was seen through and dealt with by Jesus. He broke every hold, in fact Jesus could say that the Prince of the Kosmos "has nothing in Me". (*John 14:30*).

Some people think that you "overcome the world" by living without TV, dressing in rags and eating beans and rice in a bark hut in the Australian Outback. Such drastic measures may indeed help but we actually overcome the world the way Jesus did - by trusting the Word of God (Jesus quoted Deuteronomy to Satan) and by growing in faith.

The armor of God in *Ephesians 6:10-18* is what we use - the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, the belt of truth etc. "And this is the victory that Overcomes the world, our faith." Faith, true saving faith, overcomes the world and introduces us to the eternal realm (which they are trying to prevent our entry to). Once we access the eternal we have victory over that which is temporal - we become eternal mountains of grace and all the things of the world are like shacks built on our slopes that we can easily shrug off. The apostle John puts it like this: "For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world." If we are born-again, that is, born of God, then we enter

into eternal things and have a divine nature that is "born of God" within us. This new nature shares God's nature and has no desire at all to sin.

Here are all the references to the phrase "born of God" in the New Testament:

John 1:12-13 MKJV But as many as received Him, He gave to them authority to become the children of God, to those who believe on His name, (13) who were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but were born of God.

1 John 3:9 MKJV Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

1 John 4:7 MKJV Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God.

1 John 5:1-5 MKJV Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. And everyone who loves Him who begets also loves him who has been born of Him. (2) By this we know that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and keep His commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome. (4) For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:18 MKJV We know that everyone who has been born of God does not continue to sin, but the one born of God guards himself, and the evil one does not touch him.

These verses can be confusing until we ask the question "what is born of God?" - it is not our physical life (that is "born of woman") but the spiritual life we received when we were "born-again". That which is born of God is Christ in us the hope of glory and Christ in us has no desire to sin, nor does He do so. Paul speaks of Christ "being formed in us" and of "growing up in all aspects into Him". So our eternal spiritual life, which is always sinless, still has to mature in grace.

The growth of Christ in us, is analogous to Jesus time on earth, who though he was always sinless, (*Hebrews 4:15*) nevertheless grew in stature and in favor with God and man (*Luke 2:40*) and "learned obedience through the things He suffered" (*Hebrews 5:5-9*) which meant His obedience, which never faltered was strengthened through testing like a muscle is strengthened through exercise.

Our new nature is righteous and loving and is Christ in us, and is eternal and is born of God through faith - and thus breaks the hold of the principalities and powers over the spirit of the person so that the Christian becomes free from their grip and obtains access to God through the Spirit and is able to pray, to participate in eternal things and to be a agent of grace in the redemption and reconciliation of Creation. Because Christ has overcome the world, and He dwells in us, we also can overcome the world. We prove we have overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the Son of God (having saving faith (*1 John 5:4,5*), by living righteously by the new nature (*1 John 3:9*), by dwelling in love (*1 John 4:7*) and by obeying His commandments in faith (*1 John 5:1-5*).

We are not inhabitants of this world system, the kosmos, and we should not let its powers influence us. We must live from Christ within us and thus "overcome the world".

Day 26 - John 17: 1-3

THE AUTHORITY TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE

John 17:1-3 MKJV Jesus spoke these words and lifted up His eyes to Heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son so that Your Son also may glorify You, (2) even as You have given Him authority over all flesh so that He should give eternal life to all You have given Him. (3) And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

What would you do with unlimited power - with "authority over all flesh"? Would you crush some enemies, live the high life - or use your authority to give people eternal life even if it entailed your own self-sacrifice?

Let's commence with the phrase "even as you have given Him authority over all flesh". Authority is always given - that is it is bestowed as a gift. Even if someone works very hard to please their superior they cannot demand a higher post, it still has to be awarded to them. There are many cases of people working hard for years to gain a certain high post such as a Prime Minister or Cabinet Minister only for it to be awarded to someone else. Even Pilate's authority was "given from above". Thus for Jesus His authority was a gift from the Father.

The first clear instance of the Father's gift of authority to Jesus is the healing of the paralytic:

Matthew 9:5-8 MKJV For which is easier? To say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Arise and walk! (6) But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, then He said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house. (7) And he arose and departed to his house. (8) But when the crowds saw, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Later on Jesus claims the Father has given Him authority to have life in Himself, and for judgment:

John 5:26-27 MKJV For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life within Himself, (27) and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

Finally Jesus says the Father has given Him total universal spiritual and temporal authority and that this immense authority would back the missionary efforts of the apostles (and all who carry out the Great Commission) "until the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20 MKJV And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. (19) Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen.

Now Jesus also gave authority to others - His disciples:

Luke 9:1-2 MKJV And He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and

authority over all demons and to cure diseases. (2) And He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 10:19 MKJV Behold, I give to you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the authority of the enemy. And nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Matthew 10:1 MKJV And when He had called to Him His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

Mark 6:7 MKJV And He called the Twelve and began to send them out by two and two. And He gave them authority over unclean spirits, And to all believers He gives a basic authority to enter into the courts of Heaven as children of God.

John 1:12 MKJV But as many as received Him, He gave to them authority to become the children of God, to those who believe on His name, Thus eternal life and the right to become children of God is a gift of Jesus that He gives by the exercise of His authority over "all flesh".

Spiritual authority is spiritually transmitted and seems to have been greatly increased by the Pentecost event. So much so that Jesus told His disciples:

Acts 1:4-8 MKJV And having met with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father which you heard from Me. For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now. .. But you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

How then are spiritual authority and the salvation of Christians connected? The spiritual authority enables us to break the powers that Satan uses to blind people, harden their hearts and thus prevent them from believing in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:2-4 MKJV (2) But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor adulterating the Word of God, but by the revelation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (3) But also if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those being lost, (4) in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving ones, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should not dawn on them.

In an imaginary face off between Jesus and the Devil 26 years ago - Christ might say "John is mine, I have bought him with my blood and chosen him for salvation before the foundation of the world, now hands off him, for I will draw him to Myself." Yet my salvation was not that "easy" there were a dozen people at least praying for me, so Jesus' authority to save and human intercession worked together to deliver me from darkness into the light. We need to use our delegated spiritual authority to stand in the gap for others so that they might come to know Jesus and thus inherit the gift of eternal life: "And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Let's sum up:

1. Jesus has been given authority over all flesh. (*John 17:2, Matthew 28:18*)
2. This includes authority to forgive sins and heal the sick (*Matthew 9:5-8*), and to give life and execute judgment (*John 5:26,27*).
3. It also includes the authority to give eternal life to those who believe and to grant them status in Heaven as children of God. (*John 1:12; 5:26,27; 17:1-3*)
4. Jesus delegates that authority to those undertaking ministry for Him and empowers them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and preach the Kingdom of God. (*Luke 9:1, 10:1-3*)
5. That authority is spiritually transmitted through the baptism in the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:4-8*) just as it was also given to Jesus when He was baptized with the Spirit and then did "power ministry" (*Matthew 3:13-17, 4:23*)
6. Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father with universal authority over all things in Heaven and on earth and exercises this vast authority on behalf of those who engage in the Great Commission. (*Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:34,35; 5:31*)
7. In the process Jesus gives authority to people like Paul for the building up of the Church. (*2 Corinthians 10:8, 13:10*)
8. One use of this authority is to "tear down" the Satanic resistance to the progress of the gospel so that people may come to faith. (*2 Corinthians 10:3-6*)

[If you feel you need to grow in this area of spiritual authority: (a) read Charles Kraft's excellent and balanced book "I Give You Authority" and (b) for a rather terse dot-point presentation of my material (for free) go to <http://www.aibi.ph/warfare/> and download the book.]

Day 27 -John 17:4-8

FINISHING THE WORK

John 17: 4-8 MKJV I have glorified You upon the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. (5) And now Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (6) I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave to Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (7) Now they have known that all things, whatever You have given Me, are from You. (8) For I have given to them the Words which You gave Me, and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from You. And they have believed that You sent Me.

God gives His servants a certain allotted task so that they can say "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." or as Paul says 2 Timothy 4:7 MKJV I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

John the Baptist seems to have thought the same way: Acts 13:25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Who do you think that I am? I am not *He*. But behold, One comes after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose. Thus Jesus, John the Baptist and Paul had sense of living out a calling until the end, and also had a distinct sense of when that end would be. Paul even sees all believers, as having good works that God wants each of us to do:

Ephesians 2:10 ISV For we are his masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared long ago to be our way of life.

The result of such completed work is glory to God "I have glorified You upon the earth". And at the completion of the task the servant of God can expect a reward: "And now Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

Or in Paul's case:

2 Timothy 4:8 MKJV Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but also to all those who love His appearing.

However the quality of the ministry is all-important and we cannot take short cuts and still receive a reward:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 MKJV (10) According to the grace of God, which is given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let every man be careful how he builds on it. (11) For any other foundation can no one lay than the one being laid, who is Jesus Christ. (12) And if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, (13) each one's work shall be revealed. For the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try each one's work as to what kind it is. (14) If anyone's work, which he built, remains, he shall receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss. But he shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

The apostle Peter tells us that we should live reverently being conscious that God will be the impartial judge of the quality of our good works, though they do not save us:

1 Peter 1:17-19 MKJV And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to the work of each one, pass the time of your earthly residence in fear, (18) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

While Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 MKJV (9) Therefore we are also laboring to be well pleasing to Him, whether at home or away from home. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things *done* through the body, according to that which he has done, whether good or bad. This is not judgment for salvation but for eternal status and reward. We are most clearly not saved by works, rather we are saved for works:

Ephesians 2:8-10 MKJV For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

In Jesus' case His task was to create a new community of believers that believed the teachings of Christ and understood that Jesus was sent from the Father. A community that was then sanctified by His works on the cross and empowered by the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The eleven apostles were the main fruit of the ministry of Jesus Christ. They would provide the proper leadership for the early church. Thus a key component of doing the job may be raising up leaders to replace you and carry on the work. You may be thinking, "I have no idea of the task that God has given me." Then ask the following questions:

- a) How does Scripture define good works? What biblical examples speak most to you? What would a perfectly righteous person (such as Jesus) do in your situation?
- b) What good works are you skilled at?
- c) What good works make you "come alive" spiritually?
- d) What good works give you a profound sense of accomplishment and an internal "well done" from the Holy Spirit?
- e) How can you do more of these things that are good and profitable?
- f) How can you stop doing things that are vain and unprofitable?
- g) Do you have a sense of vision or calling or a compelling sense that something "needs to be done"?
- h) Has God ever spoken to you through Scripture, prophecy or through a wise person in a way that rang true with you?
- i) What are your life circumstances and what ministry / good works do they indicate?

When you have done this bring the results to God in prayer and ask Him to guide you so that at the end of your life you may be able to say "I have finished the work that You gave me to do."

Day 28- John 17:9-12

PRAYING FOR THE SAINTS

John 17: 9-12 MKJV I pray for them. I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. (10) And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I am glorified in them. (11) And now I am in the world no longer, but these are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father. Keep them in Your name, those whom You have given Me, so that they may be one as We are. (12) While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those that You have given Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Jesus shows His intense desire for us and for our spiritual preservation in these few verses. Jesus prays for those whom the Father has given to Him. These are His to keep and protect and He does so except for the "doomed one", the Son of Perdition, Judas Iscariot who was so close to glory, yet so clearly of the Evil One - seduced by mere Mammon from the very Presence of Christ!

These verses astonish me with Jesus' seeming utter disregard for "the world" and all who belong there! "I pray for them, I do not pray for the world." Indeed most of the prayers in the New Testament are "for the saints". This prayer, Paul's pastoral prayers, and the great intercessions in Revelation, are all for the church! There are no prayers for the Roman economy or for the conduct of wars. Indeed we are to pray for governments – but only so the Church can live in peace and godliness (*1 Timothy 2:1-4*). The world can have its parades - the real business of eternity is happening in the midst of the people of God! Indeed it is the prayers I pray for the progress of God's Kingdom that are most quickly answered.

V10. "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I am glorified in them." Christ is not glorified in "the world" but He is glorified in His saints! And so if we are praying for the glory of Jesus we will be praying for His glory to be manifested in the lives of His people. "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine" All who belong to the Son – also belong to the Father, and all who belong to the Father belong to the Son. Thus if you are to belong to the Father, you must first of all belong to Christ – there is just no getting around it – you must be first a Christian before you can be a son of God the Father!

"(11) And now I am in the world no longer, but these are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father. Keep them in Your name," Jesus was moving out of the "danger zone" of the world, the place run by the Devil and his evil principalities and powers and which is hostile towards God and towards the people of God. (*1 John 5:18,19, Ephesians 2:1-3, Colossians 1:21*) but the saints were to remain there as agents of transformation, as gospel witnesses in a dark world and a "perverse and evil generation" (Acts 2:40). So Jesus prays for them, a seeming simple prayer – "keep them in Your name". Keep them in the Father, in Yahweh, in the place of grace and power that the world so often tempts us away from.

What does it mean to be kept "In Your name"? It is much more than having a Christian bumper sticker on your car or going to a church service, the place of grace is a place of faith, and a place where God owns you and you consent to His ordering your days according to His will.

Unity flows automatically when the saints are living "in Your name" – "so that they may be one as We are". First – dwelling in the Name, then intimacy with God and with each other! Obedience precedes unity! We can never be one with spiritual rebels! I cannot work with liberal theologians, though they are often intelligent, gracious and lovely people. There is a basic difference in the way we view obedience to God and the authority of the Scriptures, they dwell in the name of Human Reason not in the name of Faith and of God! First we must dwell in the Name, under the power and authority of God Almighty. Then we will find unity with those who also fear God and worship Christ from every tribe and people and tongue.

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name." One of the jobs of every pastor is to keep his flock "in the Name", to keep them in the place of grace so that "none are lost" and this takes great diligence and care. The modern CEO model of pastoring tends to undermine the role of true discipling and pastoral care. Nothing can replace knowing the true spiritual state of one's flock by visiting them in their homes, praying with them, counselling some, exhorting others and admonishing them to true faith in Christ and holy living.

Do our church programs act to keep them in God's Name? Or do they just exhaust the saints? Some churches have a big "back door" – people leave in droves, hurt, disillusioned and burned out. That is not the Jesus style of pastoring! Every single saint should be precious to the pastor and elders. Above all we should pray for people by name – that they would walk with Christ and abide in Him continually.

The apostles such as Paul prayed fervently, deeply and personally – by name, for hundreds of believers, and he knew where they were in Christ and their "goings on" from one end of the Roman Empire to the other! The apostles took Jesus' example of being passionately prayerful for the people of God and prayed for the quality of their spiritual lives above all else. In the NT there is one passing reference to a prayer for prosperity (in 3 John) and dozens if not hundreds of references to prayers for the spiritual lives of Christians – that they may walk in unity, love and wisdom and grow into the full measure of God.

Why not take pen and paper and ask the Lord to give you the names of a dozen saints that you can pray for by name that they may grow in Christ and "remain in His name". You are welcome to pray for Minda and I as part of your list!

Day 29 – John 17:13

THE JOY OF JESUS

John 17:13 MKJV And now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in them.

John 17:13 ASV But now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves.

John 17:13 GNB And now I am coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they might have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness.

Jesus is going to the Father but He wants to leave His joy behind – through His words and His precious promises. In this Upper Room Discourse Jesus is speaking to mourning disciples, just twelve or so hours before the cross. And three times He says "that your joy may be made full" - *John 15:11, 16:24, 17:13* – it seems an almost paramount concern. Here is the context of those statements:

John 15:10-11 MKJV If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (11) I have spoken these things to you so that My joy might remain in you and your joy might be full.

John 16:22-24 MKJV And therefore you now have sorrow. But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. (23) And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He

will give you. (24) Before now you have asked nothing in My name; ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

John 17:11-13 MKJV And now I am in the world no longer, but these are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father. Keep them in Your name, those whom You have given Me, so that they may be one as We are. (12) While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those that You have given Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (13) And now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in them.

The word of God in the mouth of Christ is designed to make believers confident, prayerful and joyful with an abiding and full joy that no one can take from them! Jesus wants His disciples to shout Hallelujah! The outcome of the teaching of Jesus was to be joy! Fullness of joy! "these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in them." The teaching of Jesus is joyful, celebratory, high and holy! Even painful repentance will bring "seasons of refreshing from the Lord" (*Acts 3:19*)! Joyless teaching has gone wrong somewhere. The word of the Lord is there to enliven us, quicken us and fill us with all the fruit of the Spirit – which of course includes joy!

On the other hand, Satan tries to fill our mind with depressing thoughts so that we despair and will blaspheme God. This afternoon I have had a series of puzzling technical glitches that were really trying and seemed "devilish" in origin. There have also been mysterious bad smells in the house. All this minor harassment is the joy-robbing activity of Satan over our lovely new flat and home office. Satan does not want to see us happy and rejoicing in the blessings of God! But nonetheless we shall rejoice!

Because "the joy of the Lord is our strength" when our joy is full then we are formidable Christians! Joy gives us power, poise and victory, which is part of the reason why Jesus wanted His disciples to have their joy made full. The other part is that every good Father wants happy, healthy, rejoicing children. And every good pastor and discipler wants a rejoicing church or rejoicing disciples. Jesus did not want a depressed bunch of grim super-serious apostles; rather He wanted joyful witnesses to the gospel!

Well what does He mean then by "I have spoken these things in the world...". Jesus living words were spoken in Jerusalem, in an oppressed and afflicted world, so that the light might shine in a dark place. Jesus tends to speak His most joyous words in the grimmest of times – just as He did amid the tears at Lazarus's tomb when he told Mary and Martha that He was "the resurrection and the life" (it was only later that he said Lazarus come forth!). Jesus asks us to believe His best news; at the times we are feeling the worst!

Jesus speaks "in the world" because that is precisely the place we most need to hear Him, it is the place that robs us of our joy and so it is the place where we need our joy to be made full. How then can we have the fullness of joy in Christ? Firstly decide that you want it! Then ask for it (you have not because ye ask not), and then expect it! Then practice it by deciding to believe the powerful promises of God found in the New Testament. Do not look only at your circumstances – also look at the promises and power of God!

Joy should be the permanent abiding state of the Christian soul. Yet we live in fear, dread, irritation, anxiety and depression. This is because we let in doubt, criticism, and the sour grumbling words of demons and devils. What good comes from misery? What faith springs from sourness? Who can grow in Christ who lives in perpetual dread of the future? We need to uproot such things and focus on the promises of God!

God has designed you for joy; and joy is your destiny in heaven – so get used to it!. So why chose misery? Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you! Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say rejoice!

Day 30 - John: 14-18

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT IN THE WORLD

John 17:14-18 I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (15) I do not pray for You to take them out of the world, but for You to keep them from the evil. (16) They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (17) Sanctify them through Your truth. Your Word is truth. (18) As You have sent Me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world.

Twice Jesus says that He and the disciples were not of the world - "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (V14,16). Thus all of God's true saints should be "unworldly", simple, uncluttered, unencumbered and holy.

We will certainly be mocked because of this - "and the world has hated them because they are not of the world". Simple, honest, straightforward Christians are often viewed as fools. But we have the wisdom of God, an eternal and unfading wisdom that brings true glory! The world hates those who have walked away from its pomp and its "rewards", who march to the beat of a different drummer, and who find holiness more attractive than sensuality.

Once you get a good glimpse of Heaven the world and all its vanities fade away. If you spend time before the Throne you will not spend so much time before the TV. Heaven does two things – it makes us content with a simple life on Earth, and it creates a deep longing for the permanent and the eternal, for the good and the beautiful and the noble and the wise. Such desires cannot be adequately satisfied here so we join in and sing, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasure is laid up, way beyond the blue."

Jesus then goes on to pray: "(15) I do not pray for You to take them out of the world, but for You to keep them from the evil. " Jesus does not pray for them to go into the desert, join a monastery, or be raptured at once to glory. Such convenient solutions are escapes from duty. Our duty is to be in this world, to be leaven, to be salt and to be light.

Being "in the world" is not easy. Indeed it can be deeply disturbing. As Lot was tormented day and night by the behavior of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (*2 Peter 2:8*) so

Christians are assaulted by evil every time they go online, open their email, or watch the news.

Jesus' solution was to pray that the Father would "keep them from evil" – and many a Christian parent has prayed fervently for their children at college or in the army, that they would also be kept from evil – and such prayer works! In some places evil is like a thick cloud that presses in on every thought and action. To be kept from evil, in dark places, is indeed a very great miracle! And it is one that happened to the prophet Daniel!

Daniel was brought to Babylon, made a eunuch as a young man, and set among the wise men in the section that dealt with astrology, magic and conjuring. How much worse could it get for a young Jewish man? Yet God kept Daniel and his friends and they prospered and gave glory to God and were "better than all the astrologers". Now I do not recommend joining an astrology guild in a pagan society - but even in such a place God can keep people from evil if their heart is set on remaining pure.

How can we be kept from evil? First, do not indulge evil. Do not hanker after it or nurture it. Second, stay close to God, remain in His Word and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Third, take some basic precautions – do not head into danger. For instance as a missionary who travels a lot I make sure that I am never alone in a private or semiprivate situation with a woman other than my wife. Yet other people may need blocking software on their Internet connection. (I believe this can be obtained for free from www.we-blocker.com).

Jesus then goes on to pray the answer to being pure in an impure world: "(17) Sanctify them through Your truth. Your Word is truth." How can a young man keep his way pure?

By taking heed according to Thy word! (Ps 199:9) The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit that cuts through the mess, exposes evil and puts the world in its place – as a sham. Regular daily bible study is a great way to become sanctified as the Word works in you and through you. For a bible reading plan go to:

<http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/biblereading.htm>

Then, in verse 18, Jesus says a most astonishing thing: "(18) As You have sent Me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world." This is astonishing in two aspects – firstly that Jesus would actually send us into the big, bad, evil world. Secondly that He would connect this with His won being sent from Heaven! Our going into all the world to preach the gospel is connected to Christ being sent from the Father! We are being sent to "the world" to redeem it! We are to win the world for God.

Thus, we are to overcome the world (it will not overcome us!) The light will shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overthrow it. (John 1:5) For greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4) and 1 John 5:4-5 For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jesus is sending Christians to Iraq, Afghanistan and even to Los Vegas. There is no place so unholy that the saints cannot triumph there. We are being sent to overcome the darkness. A

few weeks ago in Bangkok I came under tremendous spiritual attack. I became ill and had terrible nightmares. But through the prayers of the saints I had the victory. We can go anywhere for God, if we have folk praying for us as Jesus prayed for His disciples. Let us not be presumptuous but let us also be bold, in faith and in prayer. And if you are in the ministry – get a prayer shield.

Day 31 - John 17:19

THE PASSING ON OF HOLINESS

John 17:19 MKJV And I sanctify Myself for their sakes, so that they also might be sanctified in truth.

Why be holy? Because being holy affects those that follow us. Our spirit touches their spirit, our holiness passes on in the spiritual realm and becomes their holiness and our sins become their sins and even more so. In 1984, as a young pastor, I quickly learned that whatever sins I had soon became the sins of the entire congregation! And whatever disciplines I had slowly but surely also passed on to others also. This was an “invisible” process. It was a medium sized congregation of about 250 students. Many did not see my behaviour – but they followed it nonetheless. Therefore we must sanctify ourselves for the sake of all who follow our leadership.

If Jesus had not gone to the cross for the disciples would the apostles been willing to be martyrs for the gospel? Probably not! Followers rarely out pace the leader! Where the leader stops traveling with God - there they will stop also, and often a little short of it. If the leader has daily quiet times, most will try three times a week, if the leader lives a very simple lifestyle, they will still retain a few luxuries.

The writer to the Hebrews states it thus:

Hebrews 2:11-12 MKJV For both He who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, (12) saying, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you."

There is a close spiritual connection between “He who sanctifies” and “they who are sanctified” – so much so that they are “one”. They are a unity, a spiritual brotherhood of those being made holy. To the extent that Jesus calls us His brethren.

Thus, holiness is passed along a strong spiritual connection between Christ and Christians and I also believe – between pastor and congregation. We can preach all we like but it is our lifestyle and our sanctification that they will follow.

Who has ever been sanctified by following a televangelist, no matter how good the teaching is? The lifestyle is wrong! The listeners may hear the gospel but they will follow materialism.

A terrible plague is about to be unleashed on US churches – a plague of immorality! How can I say that – because fully 37% of pastors confess to having a serious problem with

Internet pornography! They may do this sin in private but they defile their spirit in so doing and when they stand up and preach on Sunday morning it is that defiled spirit which passes through the congregation. They will lead their flocks into serious sexual addictions and bondage!

We must sanctify ourselves so that those who follow us may be holy also.

Who becomes loving simply by listening to sermons on the four Greek words for love? Rather do not we become loving by being loved, and by seeing love demonstrated and lived out before our eyes? Can grumpy critical pastors produce loving disciples – no matter how good their exegesis? Love, joy, faith and hope are caught from those who have sanctified themselves in these things and dedicated their lives to practicing them.

Jesus sanctified Himself by going all the way to the cross so that we also might follow in His footsteps. He died so that we might die also – dying to sin, to self and to the world. Jesus did not renege on His commitment to show us the perfect example.

Now none of us are perfect examples. But we can be committed to being better examples, to sanctifying ourselves and fully setting our lives apart for God in all holiness and truth.

A holy life can have a great impact. For a very holy person will attract disciples and the lives of the disciples will be different also and in turn will attract others. Thus a small handful of men and women living holy lives can change a city.

Who can be sanctified by folly? Or made holy by boastful clattering and worldly performing? I am truly alarmed at the unholy, careless nonsense I hear from many pulpits. First of all the pastor must be a saint – after that is achieved then he can go about being a good communicator.

When we look over Church history it is the people of exceptional consecration and holiness that we treasure – St Francis, Augustine of Hippo, John Wesley, the Moravians, Mother Teresa, and so forth. The multitudes of powerful popes, archbishops and professors are lost to us, despite their fame and glory in the own time. It is the saints we value and it is the holy ones we learn from. Think of your own life, of those who have deeply affected your own walk with God – has not holiness impressed you also?

The CEO/leader model of Christian ministry has maximized effectiveness and minimized holiness – yet holiness is the most effective long-term strategy for building the Kingdom of God!

The CEO model makes easy familiar demands, that can be easily quantified and which suit the age we live in. It feels powerful and looks good – it just fails to make people holy! As a result the Church has become like the world.

We need first of all to be like Christ -with His mind, His attitudes, His behaviour, His compassion, and His mercy. Then we need to be dedicated to His purposes – seeking and saving the lost, preaching the gospel to the poor, opening the eyes of the blind, and undoing the works of the Devil. That is holiness!

Holiness is far more than a list of church behaviours; it is godliness in action, consecration, living simply that others may simply live and standing out from the lusts of the world and the pride of life. This attracts people and transforms the world and we must dedicate ourselves to it – and as we do so others will observe, watch and wait – then quietly join us in living the consecrated life.

The time for preaching holiness and practicing worldliness is over – we must sanctify ourselves unto God so that those who follow us may also be holy! Lets close with the words of the apostle Peter: 1 Pet 1:2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of *the* Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of *the* blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Day 32 - John 17: 20-23

THAT THEY MIGHT BE ONE

John 17:20-23 MKJV And I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who shall believe on Me through their word, (21) that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. (22) And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one, (23) I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.

This is Jesus' classic prayer for Christian unity. He prays for a complete spiritual unity of all true believers: "those also who shall believe on Me through their word". The result of such unity would be "that the world may believe" (v.21, 23), perfection (v.23) and a clear demonstration of the love of God (v.23).

Thus we must remove all obstacles to unity between born-again, bible-believing Christians. I do not say that we should have unity with heretics, cults or doubters of the faith. After all, the unity Jesus prays for is among believers. However among those who get this study and the millions like them, there should be unity.

This does not mean that we should all belong to the same church, or even to the same denomination, or even have identical beliefs – but we should sense that we are one, in unity sharing faith in Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

The early church faced challenges to unity along racial, doctrinal lines - as well as the immature following of human personalities. To these Paul writes:
Ephesians 4:1-6 MKJV I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, (2) with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.

The keys to unity are "lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance and love", conversely the keys to disunity are the precise opposites - haughtiness, arrogance, intolerance, impatience and hatred. Unity is thus an attitude towards others. How we handle it when others differ from us or disappoint us is critical to Christian unity. Does one bad apple ruin a whole denomination for you? Does one erratic charismatic make all charismatics evil? Or does one legalistic Baptist make all Baptists Pharisees? I hope not! We need to show forbearance over doctrinal differences that are not at the core of the faith.

Statements such as "I cannot tolerate post-millennialists" or "I cannot stand Arminians" are simply far from being Christian. Love should cover such differences. You may disagree with the doctrine but you should not reject the person who holds it. The Good Samaritan showed great kindness to a battered Jew despite profound, irreconcilable religious differences.

Thus loving our neighbour means seeing the person and their needs rather than categorizing them solely by the doctrines they hold. One of the deep questions of the ancient world was "who should we love and who should we hate?" The parable of the Good Samaritan gives the answer that we should love everyone – even heretics (for the Samaritans were viewed as such by the Jews), even people who are culturally different, and even people of other religions.

If we are to love our neighbour then how much more should we love our brothers and sisters in the Lord! How much more should we strive to be at one with them in all lowliness and meekness – even if their church is bigger than ours and they teach slightly different doctrines?

It is fine to teach and say "we hold such and such a doctrine here" or even to say "we do not believe in Y." However to say "all churches that believe Y, are Satanic especially the church Z" is a statement that should only be uttered with great caution – and then only used of cults.

We should strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity is an effort, it takes work and the work of forgiveness and forbearance and humility is among the hardest work of all.

But it is worth it and it fulfils a deep desire of the Lord Jesus that His Church be as one, even as He and the Father are as one. There must be one deep abiding spiritual essence flowing between all members of the body of Christ, one blood in all our veins, the blood that cleanses us from sin.

"And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one" – Jesus give us glory so that we might be one. What glory is this? It is the glory of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the glory of the love of God. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan He was given a glory – the glorious power of the presence of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the glory of the Church, the blessing of Abraham, and is that which works miracles in our midst (*Galatians 3:1-14*).

The Holy Spirit is the "ministry of glory" who works in us so that we are transformed "from glory to glory" (*2 Corinthians 3:8,18*) and is the "Spirit of God and of glory" (*1 Peter 4:14*).

Thus it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit that builds unity in God's Church and keeps us in the bond of peace.

Given the above – truly spiritual people should be passionate about keeping peace in the body of Christ and building and maintaining unity between believers. Contentious, divisive Christians are thus not spiritual for the Holy Spirit is not a divider of Christ. Divisiveness is carnal (see *Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4*) and is not "worthy" behaviour (*Ephesians 4:1*).

When we do obey the Holy Spirit and dwell in unity then the outcomes will be astonishing. "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me."

Unity will result in us being in such a cloud of glory and of love that we will be "made perfect" and the world will know that Jesus was sent by God and that God loves His people.

This is worth aiming for, which is why Jesus desired it so passionately, and why He prayed for it before going to the cross, and why John wrote it down in his gospel. Unity gets our prayers answered (*Matthew 18:19*) and God glorified and the saints perfected. Therefore let us move toward it in the Spirit with all patience, forbearance, long-suffering, lowliness and love.

Day 33 – John 17: 24-26

THAT THEY MAY BE WITH ME WHERE I AM

John 17:24-26 MKJV Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me, that they may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world. (25) O righteous Father, indeed the world has not known You; but I have known You, and these have known that You have sent me. (26) And I made known to them Your name, and will make it known, so that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

Jesus wants us to be with Him, where He is. At the moment that is in Heaven at the right hand of the Father – and, spiritually speaking we are seated with Him there.

Ephesians 2:4-7 MKJV But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us (5) (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved), (6) and has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

We "go to be with Christ" when we die (*Philippians 1:23*) but we also are seated with Him now (*Ephesians 2:6*), and are already citizens of Heaven (*Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 3:20*) and Hebrews says that we have already come to the heavenly Zion and a city full of angels in festal array (*Hebrews 12:22-24*). Thus in one sense we already are part of Heaven.

To be sure, while we are in this corruptible flesh we cannot fully inherit the Kingdom of God and the things of Heaven (1 Corinthians 15:50). However when we arrive there we will be welcomed as a citizen, with full rights, and sense that part of us has been there all along.

What will we do there? We will behold the eternal glory of the Lord! "Father, I desire that *those* whom You have given Me, that they may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before *the* foundation of *the* world."

This last phrase "for You have loved Me before *the* foundation of *the* world" means that Jesus is no ordinary man, nor is he just a prophet, He has been eternally in existence. He existed even before Abraham, the spiritual father of the Jews "before Abraham was, I am.." (*John 8:56-58*).

John's gospel declares the eternal existence of Jesus when it opens with "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God" (*John 1:1*)

Colossians states it thus: *Colossians 1:15-17* MKJV (15) who is *the* image of the invisible God, *the* First-born of all creation. (16) For all things were created in Him, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through Him and for Him. (17) And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

So Jesus is not just a man, He is the eternally existent God! Neither did Jesus evolve out of Creation as a sort of high spiritual principle, rather He was before Creation and was involved in its very existence and design and purpose.

Now Jesus relationship to the Father has always been one of mutual love "for You have loved Me before *the* foundation of *the* world." And Jesus wants His disciples to enter into a similar love relationship "And I made known to them Your name, and will make *it* known, so that the love *with* which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The key to this love relationship is knowing God and being aware of His attributes, His works, His glory and His will and knowing this in a way that is personally true for you. The word knows God as a curse word or a concept or a source of "luck, or at best as a moral force or a Divine Watchmaker. The idea of a genuine, deep personal connection between the believer and God that orders the whole of life is absent from worldly thinking.

Jesus puts it this way: "*John 17:25-26* MKJV O righteous Father, indeed the world has not known You; but I have known You, and these have known that You have sent me. (26) And I made known to them Your name, and will make *it* known, so that the love *with* which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

God is righteous – which means that the wicked are excluded from relationship with Him. So the world does not know Him. But certain people do know God, Most preeminently Jesus Himself "but I have known You.." and those that believe that God sent Jesus into the world (v.25) To these Jesus reveals the Father – and especially His name. He does this so that believers may know God and be loved by God and come into an intimate and internal appreciation of Jesus "so that the love *with* which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Thus in these verses Jesus is praying for the development of a spiritual community of love founded on the deep knowledge of God and of His eternally existent Son, Jesus Christ.

As we finish John 17 we need to note what Jesus did NOT pray for the disciples. He did not pray for wealth or status or power or the achievement of personal comforts and ambitions. He knew that they would die as martyrs on crosses. Jesus prayed for eternal things – which is why we still value this prayer so deeply.

Amidst all the noise and clatter today we need to learn to pray selflessly, out of the depths of the cross and for the eternal things that truly matter. The New Testament prayers of Jesus and Paul and the early church were for things such as love and wisdom and boldness in preaching the gospel. How we would be transformed if we prayed that way today!

Let us pray for the full and deep knowledge of God! Let us pray to be filled with love in all wisdom and discernment! Let us pray for the bold and powerful spread of the gospel in regions beyond! Now we have finished this chapter lets apply it and learn from it.

Day 34 – John 18: 1-2

CROSSING THE KIDRON

John 18:1-2 MKJV Having spoken these words, Jesus went out with His disciples over the winter stream in Kidron, where there was a garden. He and His disciples entered into it. (2) And Judas who betrayed Him also knew the place. For Jesus oftentimes went there with His disciples.

Jesus finishes His High Priestly prayer and crosses the Kidron. He goes from the place of prayer to the place of betrayal. From prayer to Passion. We cannot accomplish everything by prayer alone – or Jesus could have prayed the High Priestly prayer and gone home! We also need to face evil and overcome it.

The incarnation means the gospel is not just a concept – it also has to be lived out in flesh and blood in the midst of the world. Jesus gospel demanded His being torn apart – and our ministries may also do that to us.

It would be great if ministry was always a spiritual high – the crowds, the healings, the exorcisms, and the grand miracles of God. However the time comes when we have to leave that behind and cross over the Kidron into our redemptive suffering for the sake of the gospel.

Jesus could have avoided Judas and the crowds with swords and clubs simply by going to a different place where He could not be so easily found. But He chose to enter into the place of danger and of suffering as an act of obedience to God. This does not make sense to the flesh at all. It is only in the Spirit that we can willingly enter into such moments and ministries.

This requires the Lord's leading and timing. For most of His ministry Jesus would escape – he would walk through the crowd or avoid certain hostile places, and did so with great wisdom and caution – and sometimes with seemingly supernatural help. Jesus was not in love with risk for risk's sake. And, in my opinion, I think Scripture cautions us towards wisdom, rather than to headstrong folly. I am a strong believer in minimizing risk in missions wherever possible.

Yet there is a time when risk must be taken and danger entered fully into for the sake of the gospel. There is a time to plunge into a situation that we know will bring opposition, and horror and risk and pain and even death. This is the case with many of the missionaries working in the slums of the mega-cities of Asia – among people with tuberculosis and HIV, amidst injustice and violence and often physically threatened by vested interests. They cross the Kidron and enter into Gethsemane with Christ.

Jesus often went there – most of the time the Garden of Gethsemane would have been a place of prayer and refreshment and fellowship. This night it was a place of doom. So there are times when our normal routine that we follow can be the bravest thing we ever do. We are used to preaching but we know that on a particular day, if we get up in the pulpit, and preach what we know that we should preach, that it will expose us to rejection and may end our ministry – but we preach anyway.

Daniel was like that, when the edict was issued, he went to his room and resumed his routine of praying towards Jerusalem - with the windows open. He resumed his godly routine, even though it was now tinged with danger. So Jesus went, as He often did, to Gethsemane, even though He knew that Judas would soon come.

Jesus went with His disciples. He lived in community and He suffered in community. Jesus is never an isolated individualist, ruggedly facing the Universe alone. Even on the cross there was Mary and John and a crowd. He was part of them and was praying for them. Love operates with others, not apart from others. Ego is isolating. Love is communal.

Jesus lived in constant relationship with the Father, and amongst His disciples. It was the exception when He would head off into the wilderness alone to pray. Jesus is portrayed as enjoying people and parties and weddings and life in general. We learn to love in Spirit-filled community. So Jesus takes His friends with Him across the Kidron. He let His disciples see Him weep and cry out to God, and His sweat falling like drops of blood. He let them into the midst of His darkest hour.

Very few leaders let their followers see them in anguish or in any kind of suffering. Such moments are kept very secret and even having a cold is denied. But Jesus suffered in front of His friends and later, on the cross, in front of the world – and we adore Him for it. Jesus was utterly real and transparent and open to loving and being loved. Such transparent vulnerability, that drops all masks, can generally only be achieved by the most mature of leaders.

The Kidron was a brook (cheimarrhos) – a winter stream that dried up in summer, a storm runlet; a quite insignificant boundary. It was probably dry at the time. It was not like

crossing the Jordan, the Red Sea or the Euphrates, it was not a great national boundary, but it was a decisive spiritual line nonetheless.

The decisive spiritual moments and the grand life moments are often not related. When four young men had a prayer meeting in a haystack during a thunderstorm and began the Great Awakening or when Wesley listened to the preface to the Epistle to Romans and was "strangely warmed", these were ordinary moments. Our great spiritual decisions can be as simple as a few quick steps across a dry creek bed.

It is in the heart and in the Spirit that the great decisions are made. Rarely do trumpets blow when we make a significant spiritual move. I have never had a grand commissioning service in front of hundreds of people. Rather just a few friends have laid hands on me and I have hopped on the plane and gone to the place of the Lord's calling. Such a small group also commissioned Saul and Barnabas. We do not need to announce that we are going to cross the Kidron – we just take the steps.

We need to crucify the need for applause and for public recognition. God's approval should be enough. We can never enter into redemptive suffering if everything we do must be noted and applauded, such people become stuck spiritually and are permanently shallow. Approval may come, but we should never make it a prerequisite to our obedience. We should cross the Kidron quietly, prayerfully and in fellowship with others.

Day 35 - John 18: 3-6

THE GREAT I AM

John 18:3-6 MKJV Then Judas, having received a band and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (4) Then Jesus, knowing all things that were coming upon Him, went out and said to them, Whom do you seek? (5) They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I AM! And Judas who betrayed Him also stood with them. (6) Then as soon as He had said to them, I AM, they went backward and fell to the ground.

The "I AM" sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John have received much attention from biblical scholars. They seem to fall into three main groups:

The first group is when Jesus describes Himself, His mission and His identity e.g. "I am the Light of the World" "I am the Bread of Life, "I am the Good Shepherd", "I am the Door of the Sheep". "I am the Son of God", "I am the Resurrection and the Life", "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", and "I am the True Vine".

The second group is when He is (apparently) speaking in Aramaic and using I AM as a parallel to the Jewish name of God "YHWH" (which means I AM). In these verses Jesus is identifying with the eternal realm and specifically with God Himself. See John 4:26, 6:20, 8:24,28,58; 13:13, 13:19, 18:5,6,8.

There is also a third group where Jesus defines some characteristic of Himself, often in contrast to the something else e.g. "I am not of this world", "I am from above", "I am from Him, and He has sent Me", "I am not alone", "I am one who bears witness of Myself", "I am coming to you", "I am in the world no longer", etc. These sayings define the identity of Jesus relative to other things such as the Father, the world and the heavenly realms.

Today's verses fall into the second category when Jesus is identifying directly with the sacred name of God the Father. Some other examples of this can be found in John chapter 8:

John 8:23-28 MKJV And He said to them, You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (24) Therefore I said to you that you shall die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins.(28) Then Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things.....

John 8:57-58 MKJV Then the Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? (58) Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I AM!

When Jesus used this phrase in the Garden, the soldiers "went backward and fell to the ground". The massive personal authority of Jesus Christ and the sacred name of God simply stunned them into submission even though they possessed "lanterns and torches and weapons". Jesus claimed not just earthly authority – but heavenly authority which is why He says in Matthew 28:18 "all authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth". This is a preposterous claim for any human being to make – unless they are God. Even Moses did not claim such authority.

To say that you existed prior to Abraham, that you were the Light of the World, the Son of God, and had all authority in heaven and on earth, and that anyone who did not believe in you would perish...is very unusual to say the least. If these extraordinary statements are true, then you must be God, or at least utterly different from normal humans. If they are false then you are either a lunatic or a liar – and Jesus' wisdom and miracles show that he was neither of those.

These self-referential claims of Christ cannot be dodged. Who can say such things about themselves? Who would have anyone believe such things? The fact that Jesus said them is shocking. And you either agree with them, or you are lost. And where did Judas stand? On the wrong side! "And Judas who betrayed Him also stood with them (the soldiers)."

Lets just take one such statement: "John 14:6 MKJV Jesus said to him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me." No normal sane mortal can say this – not Plato or Einstein or Moses or Elijah. At most a normal sane mortal can claim that their doctrines or ideas are essential – but not they themselves. But here Jesus claims that He personally is essential to the salvation of all mankind. Is He eluded? Is He a con man? Or Is He God? The proof is in the eating – or in this case in the believing. Those who believe are changed and transformed. Believing these statements about Jesus works – at the deepest levels of the human spirit. They give life and salvation – because they are true!

In the Garden the I AM statements of Jesus caused shock, and they immediately divided everyone there into two groups; the saved and the damned, the sons of light and the Son of Perdition, the believers and the unbelievers. Reason stumbles and falls at statements like these. They can only truly be apprehended by faith.

Each such statement calls out the true believers from the crowd – and offends the unbelievers. Thus the I AM statements of Jesus are powerful tools for evangelism, which is why they are in the most evangelistic of all the gospels “so that you may believe”. Those that the Holy Spirit has prepared to receive Christ will latch on to them, while those who will not believe will be offended and walk away.

When Jesus says “I AM”, He is saying “I am the eternal God-Man, before Abraham was I AM, all authority in heaven and on earth is mine, I am from above, from the Father, the Son of God. I am the Way, the light of the World, the Living Bread that has come down from Heaven. I am the Resurrection and the Life and he who believes on Me will never die”. No prophet ever claimed such things! Jesus is not an angel or a prophet – He is God!

Day 36 - John 18:7-9

I HAVE LOST NOT ONE

John 18: 7-9 MKJV Then He asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. (8) Jesus answered, I have told you that I AM. Therefore if you seek Me, let these go away; (9) (that the word might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me, I have lost not one of them").

The Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The flock is cared for, protected and known by name. The boast of Jesus is “I have lost not one of them.” The disciples are far more than statistics on a church roll, or donors in a database. They are a trust from the Father and Jesus would rather die than lose even one of them.

How impersonal our pastoral care has become in the majority of churches! Visiting the sick, pastoral calls at home, even phone calls to see how people are going are now very rare indeed. Church has tended to become either a stage production or a business enterprise – or both. Church members come and go, get saved and fall away, and hardly anyone notices for long. There is little anguish over backsliders and not much joy over salvations. Rejoicing is kept for large donations.

Church is about lives being lived for God, so a church full of old people is actually a good thing – because it means people have stayed the course and kept the faith. On the other hand, an established church full of young people is mostly an evil thing – because it means they are all falling away in their thirties and forties – often due to materialism or an immature faith that cannot cope with mid-life problems. A shepherd who does not keep his flock from going astray is a wicked shepherd.

Evangelism is important – but so is diligent pastoral care. What use is it bringing many lambs to birth if the wolves of our culture devour them all?

Keeping the flock requires at least three things, attention to the flock so the Shepherd knows their condition exactly, knowledge of how to feed and tend them, and the courage to protect them from evil and to confront those that would harm them. Most bible colleges give reasonable training in how to feed and tend the flock of God. But attention to the people who sit in the pews is a personal task and it is a systematic discipline of praying for them by name, phoning them regularly, and visiting them, in their homes, at least twice a year. This can be done if the pastor's time is used wisely. Developing an active team of elders trained in visiting and pastoral care can be a big help especially in larger churches, but the pastor must still set the standard.

The courage to protect the flock from evil is doubly needed in these days of sexual predators and con-men entering the churches. Not only do we have to guard against false doctrine – but against false people with wicked designs. Many good policies have been developed to safeguard churches – such as background checks on children's workers, team teaching (so children are not alone with an adult) and windows in the doors of rooms used for child-care.

Beyond this there is the vigilant care of souls. The ability to sense when someone is going astray and then striving in the Spirit to bring them back to the faith. Programs have largely replaced this ancient sense of the "care of souls" and the "cure of souls". Programs can be effective and have their place – such as in training counsellors before a crusade. But mass production is not found in nature or in the Spirit. Soul care is an individualized thing – and will always be that way.

There is no substitute for deeply knowing one another – how else can we carry out the "one another" command such as love one another, encourage one another, exhort one another, etc? These all require community and an accurate knowledge of the other. The techniques of mass production do not impart such personal and particular knowledge. There are solutions - small groups, house churches, prayer partners, eating together, and pastoral visiting are all ways of building up our personal knowledge of one another.

Jesus took the initiative to protect His flock by confronting the mob and demanding that He alone face the wrath of the High Priests. Jesus faced evil, and endured the consequences, in order that the flock might be saved and so He could say to the Father "Of those whom You have given Me, I have lost not one of them."

We need to take the initiative to protect the flock from the things that would ravage it – false teaching, injustice, immoral intruders, con-men and "investors", some types of multi-level marketing, extremists, and various common sins and weaknesses.

Sometimes we will have to be very bold and stand between the flock and the danger. One day we will have to give an account of our ministry. That should embolden us to protect the flock – for we will have to give an account of how we have cared for those given into our charge. It does not matter if "no-one visits parishioners any more" – what matters is what God expects, not what other pastors do.

Finally, Jesus saw the disciples as gifts from God “of those whom you have given Me.” – not as pains in the neck! Some pastors live in opposition to the congregation. Instead the pastor should view the congregation as gifts from God, then in time they will form the same opinion of the pastor. When we realize that it is God who sends the folk into our church we will start seeing them with new eyes. And with this realization we will make our church the sort of place where God would want to send His precious saints – that is a place full of love, grace, truth and pastoral care.

Day 37 - John 18: 10-14

THE CUP WHICH THE FATHER HAS GIVEN ME

John 18:10-14 MKJV Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. And the servant's name was Malchus. (11) Then Jesus said to Peter, Put up your sword into the sheath. The cup, which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it? (12) Then the band, and the chiliarch, and under-officers of the Jews together seized Jesus and bound Him. (13) And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. (14) And Caiaphas was he who gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

Peter was always very protective of Jesus. In Matthew 16:22 Peter objects to the idea of Jesus being crucified, here Peter draws his sword in misplaced defensive loyalty. Jesus does not need our protection. If He has wanted to He could have called own twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53) or fire from Heaven (2 Kings 1:10, Luke 9:54).

The idea that we need to defend God is a grand folly that has caused everything from embarrassment to evil and even given rise to such atrocities such as the Inquisition. God is well able to take care of Himself – and all of us to boot!

God is not a concept that has to be explained, argued for and defended. Rather, God is a personal spiritual being of immense grandeur and power. God is like Jesus – personal, powerful and majestic.

If God is just a philosophy, a grand and wonderful notion, or an inspiring idea then of course we need to argue for “it” and explain and defend our position. It would then be essential for people to share and understand our point of view. But God is not a mere idea or notion. He is a Person of vast power and intelligence who is fully able to reveal and explain Himself - even without our help. A drug addict can have a vision and come to a deep understanding of God and of salvation in Christ all without the help of a single theologian.

God does not need my sword. He will tell me to put it in its sheath. If God wants to be vulnerable and die on a cross – then that is His prerogative. And if God wants to come in glory with ten thousand times ten thousand angels – then that is also His complete right.

"Then Jesus said to Peter, Put up your sword into the sheath. The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" For Jesus this was Destiny. It was God's cup – and He would drain it to the last drop. And it was a destiny written in the Scriptures that Peter was helpless to do anything about. Matthew's gospel puts it this way:

Matthew 26:52-56 MKJV Then Jesus said to him, Put up your sword again into its place; for all who take the sword shall perish with a sword. (53) Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? (54) But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? (55) In that hour Jesus said to the crowds, Have you come out in order to take Me with swords and clubs, as against a thief? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not lay hands on Me. (56) But all this happened that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples fled, forsaking Him.

"But all this happened that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." In other words – "God is in control, you cannot stop this, the prophets predicted it, so give up trying to save me". And so they fled. It was the wisest thing to do; courage would achieve nothing – for "it is written" sealed it all. I think part of the reason they fled was also because it seemed that God had gone crazy. The idea of a God who would be vulnerable and die was too bizarre and shocking for the human mind to comprehend. Jesus chose to neither fight nor flee but to commit Himself to God in suffering and death. The physical "fight or flight" response is something we need to master. Jesus never gave in to it for a second. Even facing Satan in the wilderness he did not flee and He did not fight in a fleshly fashion. He simply trusted God and the Scriptures and mastered the situation in the Spirit.

In the Garden the choices were fight, flight or mastery. Peter chose "fight" and when that was rebuked, the rest chose "flight". Only Jesus displayed mastery. It is this third way, the way of mastery through faith, the way of drinking the cup given to us by God, that is the path of the Spirit.

Someone insults you, viciously, in public. Do you fight? Do you flee? Or do you return a blessing and display mastery of the situation? You are in a meeting and your idea, which you have worked hard to present, is being willfully misunderstood and shot down in flames. Do you fight? Do you flee? Or do you take authoritative mastery of the situation in the Spirit like Jesus in His debates with the Pharisees?

The mastery that Jesus displayed in the Garden of Gethsemane is the "via media" – the middle way, and the way of God. In the strange ways of God, sometimes the most masterful thing we can do is to choose to suffer evil on the behalf of others. Calm acceptance of God's will, could be a more powerful statement than drawing a sword and chopping off Malchus' ear.

By nature I am a "fighter" and I spend a lot of spiritual energy trying to fight my way out of situations that God has put me in. I would far rather lead a cavalry charge than deal with bureaucracy and futility. I have to learn to "drink the cup" and trust God with the outcome. Sometimes the most masterful thing I can do is just to be still and know that He is God.

Day 38 - John 18:13-18

THE FAILINGS OF THE FLESH

John 18: 13-18 MKJV And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. (14) And Caiaphas was he who gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. (15) And Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus into the court of the high priest. (16) But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple went out, the one who was known to the high priest, and spoke to her who kept the door and brought Peter in. (17) Then the girl who kept the door said to Peter, Are you not also one of this man's disciples? He said, I am not. (18) And the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold. And they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

Yesterday we looked at the three way choice – fight, flight or mastery and how the flesh lead us to either fight or flee, while the Spirit leads us to mastery. In yesterday's verses Peter was fighting, in today's verses Peter is fleeing. Both are the responses of a threatened man - who is adrift from the Spirit of God.

Fear and threat were Peter's weak points. When Jesus talked about being crucified that threatened Peter and he started rebuking Jesus. When Peter was walking on the water and he saw the wind – he became afraid and sank. In the Garden Peter drew his sword and in the court of the high priest Peter denies Christ.

Fear is not easy to deal with, especially when the threat is very real; and even more so if, like Peter, you are a big man who can bluster through most things. Fear can place an icy grip on our heart and totally take over our thought processes. Fear is so powerful that it is Satan's main weapon and his demons have an incredible ability to inject fear into the human spirit.

That is why the Bible says, some 366 times, "Fear not" or "do not be afraid" or similar sentiments. God is totally committed to driving fear out of our lives. In fact, His love casts out all fear.

1 John 4:18 MKJV There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love.

Peter was not confident in high company. He stood outside the door when John ("the other disciple") went in to the court with Jesus. John seems to be an upper class Jew, well known to the high priest and to people such as Nicodemus. But Peter was a fisherman in a hierarchical society and was socially intimidated. Even though John got Peter an invitation inside he still preferred to sit with the soldiers and servant girls.

Next Peter gave in to his physical desire for comfort and pampered his flesh at the wrong moment. He warmed himself by the fire instead of standing by Jesus during His trial. Yes, it was cold. Yes it was not a sin in itself – but it was a weakness that led to a disaster. Earlier the disciples had slept instead of praying, now Peter was warming himself instead of going in with Jesus. The flesh was winning the war.

Strong faith has certain rigorousness to it. The strong Christian can switch off the TV during the Olympics and go and pray. The strong Christian can fast. The strong Christian can take the discipline of study, or the conditions on the mission field. Too much pampering just strengthens the flesh and weakens the Spirit.

Earlier that same evening Jesus had given His disciples this advice:

"Matthew 26:41 MKJV "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The spirit is indeed willing to obey God, but the flesh loves the warmth of the fire on a cold night.

Now while Spirit-filled Christians are disciplined, they are not ascetics, and the bed of nails and self-torture have no place in the faith (see Colossians 2:20-23). We simply follow the leading of the Spirit – wherever that takes us, and at times that may mean some discomfort. But it is not the discomfort that is spiritual – rather, the following of the Holy Spirit.

Peter was not following the Holy Spirit; rather he was following his fears, his social timidity, and his own desire for comfort. This is a potent combination that has sideline countless Christians with missionary calls on their life. Fear, the social lowliness of the missionary life, and the desire "for a little comfort" has kept many Christians from an adventurous life following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Peter seems to have collapsed in on himself. He may even have been in mild shock. The adrenalin that was flowing twenty minutes before in the Garden has had nowhere to go, his blood sugar is being burned up and he is withdrawing from others and feeling cold. The blood has moved away from the brain and Peter is not thinking straight. At this point the Devil attacks and sends the slave girl along to test Peter – and he says "I am not." Fear, in a tired mind and a weary body has won the day.

There are times when our body is not our friend. Fear, lust and rage all emanate from physical responses. We need to master the body. And the way to master the flesh is via the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

We need to walk in the Spirit. To do this, first pray a brief prayer and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*). Then listen to the voice in your conscience that is the voice of God. Obey that voice and obey the word of God. As you listen and obey the voice of the Spirit will become ever more distinct. Gradually the nudges from God will become second nature and you will be following Jesus through the day. This moment-by-moment communion with God is what is known as walking in the Spirit or "keeping in step with the Spirit". (*Galatians 5:25*). In the process you will keep on choosing God's will over other alternatives and so the good choices will become easier and easier and stronger and

stronger. This denying of evil and choosing good is called "crucifying the flesh" – and is a consequence of the Spirit-filled life.

Gal 5:24,25 But those belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Day 39 – John 18: 19-24

JESUS BEFORE ANNAS

John 18:19-24 MKJV Then the high priest asked Jesus of His disciples and of His teaching. (20) Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always resort, and I have said nothing in secret. (21) Why do you ask Me? Ask those who heard me what I have said to them. Behold, they know what I said. (22) And when He had spoken this way, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Do you answer the high priest so? (23) Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me? (24) Then Annas had sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Annas is a fascinating bible character and is perhaps the chief villain of the New Testament after Judas. The next three paragraphs are an edited version of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia entry on Annas:

A high priest of the Jews, the virtual head of the priestly party in Jerusalem in the time of Christ, a man of commanding influence. That he was an adroit diplomatist is shown by the fact that five of his sons (*Ant.*, XX, ix, 1) and his son-in-law Caiaphas (John 18:13) held the high priesthood in almost unbroken succession. Another mark of his continued influence is, that long after he had lost his office he was still called "high priest," and his name appears first wherever the names of the chief members of the sacerdotal faction are given. Acts 4:6, "And Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest." Annas is almost certainly called high priest in John 18:19, John 18:22, though in John 18:13, John 18:24 Caiaphas is mentioned as the high priest. Note especially the remarkable phrase in Luke 3:2, "in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas," as if they were joint holders of the office.

The explanation seems to be that owing to age, ability and force of character Annas was the virtual, though Caiaphas the titular, high priest. He and his family were proverbial for their rapacity and greed. The chief source of their wealth seems to have been the sale of requisites for the temple sacrifices, such as sheep, doves, wine and oil, which they carried on in the four famous "booths of the sons of Annas" on the Mount of Olives, with a branch within the precincts of the temple itself. During the great feasts, they were able to extort high monopoly prices for theft goods.

Hence, our Lord's strong denunciation of those who made the house of prayer "a den of robbers" (*Mark 11:15-19*), and the curse in the Talmud, "Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses" (*Pes 57a*).

As to the part he played in the trial and death of our Lord, although he does not figure very prominently in the gospel narratives, he seems to have been mainly responsible for the course of events. Renan's emphatic statement is substantially correct, "Annas was the principal actor in the terrible drama, and far more than Caiaphas, far more than Pilate, ought to bear the weight of the maledictions of mankind" (*Life of Jesus*). Caiaphas, indeed, as actual high priest, was the nominal head of the Sanhedrin, which condemned Jesus, but the aged Annas was the ruling spirit.

According to John 18:12-13, it was to him that the officers who arrested Jesus led Him first. "The reason given for that proceeding ("for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas") lays open alike the character of the man and the character of the trial" (Westcott, in the place cited). Annas (if he is the high priest of John 18:19-23, as seems most likely) questioned Him concerning His disciples and teaching. This trial is not mentioned by the synoptists, probably because it was merely informal and preliminary and of a private nature, meant to gather material for the subsequent trial. Failing to elicit anything to his purpose from Jesus, "Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest" (John 18:24 the King James Version is incorrect and misleading) for formal trial before the Sanhedrin, "but as one already stamped with a sign of condemnation" (Westcott).

Jesus had upset Annas' temple trade by overturning the tables in the Temple and criticizing the High Priest's successful commercial venture that turned a house of prayer for all nations into a "den of thieves". Thus the irate Annas became the human driving force behind the crucifixion of Christ. Find an expert ecclesiastical politician, who loves money, and you will always find a major enemy of the true gospel of Christ.

Jesus refused to answer Annas questions about "His disciples and His teaching". Why this discourtesy? Because Jesus knew that Annas was not interested in the answer. Rather he would have used any answer to trap Christ and persecute Jesus' disciples. We are not obliged to answer anyone who asks us a question – especially if they will malign us for our answer.

Ecclesiastical authority is not necessarily the voice of God. Annas certainly wasn't! And many popes and pastors and elders have been almost as evil. When Jesus refuses to comply with the ecclesiastical power broker He is literally "slapped down" and put in chains. Christians who stand up for the true gospel of the cross and of life in the Spirit will often be "slapped down" by worldly power brokers in religious institutions.

What should we do in such situations? Exactly as Jesus did – ask them to show the merit of their case and to demonstrate what the problem is. "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" If we genuinely are wrong, then we can repent, but if they cannot find any genuine fault, then we have a testimony – even if it is ignored. Jesus refused to be intimidated by religious authority that was obviously divorced from the Spirit of God – and we should take a similar stand.

Day 40 - John 18: 25-27

AND IMMEDIATELY A COCK CROWED

John 18:25-27 MKJV And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Then they said to him, Are you not also one of his disciples? He denied and said, I am not. (26) One of the servants of the high priest, being kinsman to him whose ear Peter cut off, said, Did I not see you in the garden with him? (27) Peter then denied again. And immediately a cock crowed.

The predicted failure occurs.

Jesus had prophesied: *John 13:38 Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for My sake? Truly, truly, I say to you, The cock shall not crow until you have denied Me three times.*

And so it came to pass.

Now was Peter culpable? After all it was a prophesy of Jesus – it had to come true! Satan was sifting him like wheat (Luke 22:31) and Peter was only human. Here God's foreknowledge, our responsibility, and the Devil's tempting and accusing all meet in the unfortunate person of Peter.

And they also meet in the person of Judas, the son of Perdition, who was lost so that the Scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:12).

Peter made a series of disastrous choices, and fulfilled the word of the Lord. Judas made a series of disastrous choices and fulfilled the prophecies in Psalms (41:9, 109:28) and Zechariah (11:12,13).

How can God destine one man to brokenness and the other man to Hell? How can Jesus restore one to apostleship, and lose another to the Devil? Are our lives entirely out of our control? Are they entirely decided in Heaven? Can something as specific as "you will deny me three times before the cock crows" be planned beforehand for us?

On one hand Peter would say that he chose to deny Christ. Nobody pointed a gun at his head or twisted his arm up his back. God did not make Peter sin, though God did allow Satan to test him and to break him. And neither did God make Judas betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver – though God did allow Satan to enter into Judas.

God knows all our days in advance (Psalm 139:16) – but we live them one at a time. My life has not turned out quite like anything I planned. Yet I keep on planning! I sense God's hand has been with me all along and that He is not surprised at all, about what I am doing today. I sense that He has directed my life and brought me to this place and that I am here for a reason. I also sense that God wants me to think ahead, be wise and plan carefully and act like a wise steward.

Is this totally contradictory? Why am I responsible to plan my ministry and be wise if it is all decided by God in the first place? Why even bother planning to get out of bed – or setting

the alarm clock? Surely the time I awake is predestined? Mmm – maybe that is taking things too far!

Both predestination and free will are truths that can be pushed too far.

On one hand we must recognize that God is not accountable for our destiny or how He treats us. We can never put God on trial like Job tried to do. Judas cannot say “that was mighty unfair making me the Son of Perdition just so you could fulfill Your Scriptures.” God will not be judged by you, by me or by Judas.

On the other hand we should thank God for the freedom of choice He does give us. He does allow me to plan certain things within His will – while He predestines others. I do have to set the alarm clock!

A helpful analogy I use is a bar of silver. Each silver atom donates an electron to a floating sea of electrons that move around randomly within the metal bar. The movement of each individual electron is randomly chosen, but the voltage of the bar is precisely determined – zero volts. On the macro scale we have predestination, on the micro scale we have free will.

So it is with my life. I am absolutely sure that God predestines the overall tenor of my life and that He planned that I would be a Christian and a missionary from birth. However there is a lot of small stuff that is up to me.

Yet I also have a sense of total free will. During my conversion experience God appeared as a light and said “If you choose not to believe in Me now, then I will leave you alone forever.” (I was a quite anti-Christian atheistic rationalist / Zen Buddhist at the time) I had a real sense of choosing to believe in God. God is not a God of coercion, but I think He always knew I would believe.

Paul had a sense of being separated to God “from his mother’s womb” (*Galatians 1:16*) like Samson (*Judges 16:17*), and John the Baptist (*Luke 1:15*). And each of these bible characters are quite different in the way they reacted to being separated by God. Paul initially resisted his calling and became a persecutor of the church before getting on the right track and fulfilling it, Samson messed his up separation with wild living, and John the Baptist fulfilled his destiny with honor as the ‘greatest born of women” (*Matthew 11:11-13*).

It seems that sometimes God give us great latitude to choose, and at other times He manages the tiniest details of our lives so that His plans and purposes might be fulfilled.

INTO THE PRAETORIUM

John 18:28-33 MKJV Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the praetorium. And it was early. And they did not go into the praetorium, that they should not be defiled, and that they might eat the Passover. (29) Then Pilate went out to them and said, What charge do you bring against this man? (30) They answered and said to him, If he were not an evildoer, then we would not have delivered him up to you. (31) Then Pilate said to them, You take him and judge him according to your Law. Then the Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death (32) (that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke signifying what death He was about to die). (33) Then Pilate entered into the praetorium again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Three times in this short passage the phrase "into the praetorium" is used. The Praetorium was the official residence of the Procurator – the Roman Governor, in this case Pontius Pilate. It was Gentile territory and the Jews would not go into it "that they should not be defiled, and that they might eat the Passover."

Firstly, we see the upside down religious mentality that quibbles over rules of purity but gladly commits the murder of an innocent man. Jesus rightly calls this "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel." (Matthew 23:24) They were meticulous over the small things, and entirely missing the big things – such as justice, mercy and compassion.

Secondly, we see that "they wanted to eat the Passover". The Passover was like Christmas dinner – a large elaborate meal with the whole family that no one wanted to miss. So they had to be ritually clean. In their eyes the murder the Son of God would not defile them, but setting foot on Gentile ground would! The true Passover was in their midst! The true Passover was happening in and to Jesus Christ! Just like people eager to open Christmas presents often miss the true meaning of Christmas, the Jews eager to eat the Passover missed the true meaning of the cross.

Thirdly, Jesus was not defiled. He went into the Praetorium and did so without losing His purity. In fact the presence of Jesus there made it holy ground. Jesus was undefile-able (if there is such a word). If you touched a dead body you were supposed to become defiled, but Jesus touched the young man on the bier and the young girl Tabitha Jesus was not defiled – instead they rose from the dead! Similarly lepers made one unclean – but when Jesus touched them He did not become unclean – rather they were healed. Another case is the woman with the issue of blood – who touched the hem of His garment. Jesus should have been made unclean – that did not happen, instead the woman was healed.

God cannot be made unclean by anything (or that thing would be more powerful than God) and Jesus was God. Thus Jesus can turn up anywhere – even in the Praetorium. New Testament Christians have similar powers – to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, cleanse lepers and overcome all the powers that normally make people "unclean". This is part of the reason that there are no unclean foods or drinks for Christians.

The concept that Christians could go into Gentiles homes without being defiled took a long time to sink in. After Peter visited Cornelius he received a "church delegation" on this

matter: "Acts 11:2-3 MKJV And when Peter had come up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, (3) saying, You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them." In fact it took a major church conference in Acts 15 to settle the question that the Gentiles were acceptable to God, even without circumcision or Jewish ritual laws.

By going into the praetorium Jesus was entering the territory of the Gentiles, and furthermore by speaking respectfully to Pilate Jesus was demonstrating courteous human acceptance of those outside the Covenant.

Jesus entering the praetorium also tells us that the Word of God can enter the least religious of places – places of injustice, oppression, uncleanness, politics and power. The Word of God is not defiled by being shared with politicians or prostitutes or with a woman at the well.

Jesus enters into places that the "religious" would balk at going to. The Pharisees stood outside, but Jesus went inside and conversed. Salvation Army officers will go into a hotel that many other denominations would shun. That is why they are very much loved. We have to take the gospel to the sinners wherever they are and not fear personal defilement in the process.

The reason Jesus was brought to the praetorium is that the Jews wanted Jesus dead see verses 30 to 32 above. (Only Pilate could carry out executions.) Savage punishment was not enough; Jesus had to be finished with! Here was Jesus, bound in chains, taken to the Gentiles, to be condemned to death and yet His presence has such magnetism and power that Pilate asks "Are you the King of the Jews?"

The final reason that Jesus entered the Praetorium is that it was on the site of the Jewish royal palace that Rome had commandeered for its use. In other words Jesus went into the praetorium because He should have been there all along because He was the King!

Day 42- John 18:33-38

I FIND NO FAULT IN HIM

John 18: 33-38 MKJV Then Pilate entered into the praetorium again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews? (34) Jesus answered him, Do you say this thing of yourself, or did others say it to you about Me? (35) Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you to me. What have you done? (36) Jesus answered; My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight so that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from here. (37) Pilate then said to Him, Are you a king then? Jesus answered; You say it that I am a king. To this end I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. (38) Pilate said to Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, I find no fault in him.

Pilate clearly knew that Jesus was innocent and after his questioning reports "I find no fault in Him". This is an extraordinary statement from someone like Pilate who was fond of crucifying Jews and generally detested them. Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea between 27-37 AD and is mentioned in all the gospels. His role in Christ's death is put together by the ISBE thus: (begin ISBE quote)

The parts may be fitted together thus: Jesus is brought to Pilate (*Mat 27:2; Mar 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:28*). Pilate asks for a specific accusation (*John 18:29-32*). Pilate enters the praetorium, questions Jesus about His alleged kingship, and receives the answer that He rules over the kingdom of truth, and over the hearts of men who acknowledge the truth. Pilate asks: "What is truth?" (Reported briefly in *Mat 27:11; Mar 15:2; Luke 23:3*, and with more detail *John 18:33-38*). Pilate brings Him forth (this is the only detail that needs to be supplied in order to make the harmony complete, and in itself it is probable enough), and many accusations are made against Him, to which, to Pilate's surprise, He makes no reply (*Mat 27:12-14; Mar 15:3-5*). Pilate affirms His innocence, but the charges are repeated (*Luke 23:4f*). Pilate sends Him to Herod, who in mockery clothes Him in shining raiment, and sends Him back (*Luke 23:6-12*). Pilate declares that neither Herod nor himself can find any fault in Him, and offers to scourge Him and let Him go (*Luke 23:13-16; John 18:38*). Pilate offers to release Jesus in accordance with an ancient custom (*Mat 27:15-18; Mar 15:6-10; John 18:39*). Pilate's wife sends him a message warning him not to harm Jesus because she has suffered many things in a dream because of Him (*Mat 27:19*).

The people, persuaded thereto by the chief priests and elders, choose Barabbas, and, in spite of the repeated protests of Pilate, demand that Jesus shall be crucified (*Mat 27:20-23; Mar 15:11-14; Luke 23:18-23; John 18:40*). Pilate washes his hands before the people, and they take the guilt of the deed upon themselves and their children (*Mat 27:24f*). Pilate releases Barabbas and orders Jesus to be scourged (*Mat 27:26; Mar 15:15; Luke 23:24f*).

Jesus is scourged and mocked, buffeted and spit upon (*Mat 27:27-31; Mar 15:16-20; John 19:1-3*). Pilate again declares the innocence of Jesus, brings Him out, and says: "Behold the man!" The chief priests and officers cry out: "Crucify him!" They accuse Him of making Himself the Son of God. Pilate, becoming more afraid at this saying, once more interviews the prisoner in the praetorium. He again tries to release Him, but is accused of treachery to

the emperor. Overborne by this, Pilate sits on the judgment seat, and says: "Behold your King!" Again the cry goes up:

"Away with him, crucify him!" Pilate says: "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered with a final renunciation of all that God had given them, saying:

"We have no king but Caesar" (*John 19:4-15*). Pilate sentences Jesus and gives Him up to be crucified, and He is led away (*Mat 27:31; Mar 15:20; Luke 23:26; John 19:16*). Pilate writes a title for the cross, and refuses to alter it (*John 19:19-22*).

The Jews ask of Pilate that the legs of the three who were crucified might be broken (*John 19:31*). Joseph of Arimathea begs the body of Jesus from Pilate (*Mat 27:57, Mat 27:58; Mar 15:42 f; Luke 23:50-52; John 19:38*). Pilate is surprised that Jesus has died so soon, and questions the centurion (*Mar 15:44*). He gives up to Joseph the body of Jesus (*Mat 27:58; Mar 15:45; John 19:38*). The chief priests and the Pharisees obtain permission from Pilate to take precautions against any theft of the body of Jesus (*Mat 27:62-66*). (end of ISBE quote).

These passages declare the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of the Jews who forced Pilate's hand in His death. Pilate obviously wants nothing to do with this case. Finally faced with a ravaging mob Pilate washes his hands:

Matthew 27:24-25 MKJV But when Pilate saw that it gained nothing, but rather that a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see to it. (25) Then all the people answered and said, Let His blood be on us and on our children.

Jesus was a completely innocent man crucified by jealous Temple officials and bloodthirsty Pharisees. No normal court of justice would have found Jesus guilty of anything. Hebrews declares Him to be "without sin". (Hebrews 4:15) Also Jesus was no threat to Caesar because His Kingdom was "not of this world" and so His servants were not going to fight for it. (John 18:36) We need to remember that God's Kingdom is independent of all earthly political systems and that we should not take up violent cudgels for such causes.

Jesus was innocent because He lived totally for the Truth. "To this end I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Truth is rare in politics, which is why Pilate answers, "What is truth?" Christians should be independent-minded people of truth and reason not adherents of partisanship and propaganda. We must stand for the truth even if it is unpopular and unfashionable. Pilate was swayed by vociferous public opinion, but Jesus always stood firm for the truth.

Day 43 - John 18: 38-40

JESUS OR BARABBAS

John 18:38-40 MKJV Pilate said to Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, I find no fault in him. (39) But you have a custom that I should release one to you at the Passover. Then do you desire that I release to you the king of the Jews? (40) Then they all cried again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas! But Barabbas was a robber.

Barabbas (son of the Rabbi OR son of the father) gets a mention in all four gospels as a murderous violent criminal involved in an insurrection who was chosen for release by the Jews instead of Christ. (*Matthew 27:15-26, Mark 15:6-15, Luke 23:16-25, John 18:38-40*). He was an utterly lawless person.

In a spiritual sense Barabbas is "lawlessness" - the untamed wild violent destructive urges of the psyche that engage in rebellion and want nothing more than release from imprisonment by the law. Of course Barabbas was a real historical person. Yet he is also a spiritual principle of lawlessness and anarchy. Barabbas is the sort of person that should be in jail - and he is also the part of us that must never be let loose. He is almost an anti-Christ figure, a brutal representation of the "mystery of lawlessness" that Paul speaks about in Thessalonians. (*2 Thessalonians 2:7*)

In the movie "Born To Be Wild" lawlessness was idealized as "freedom" but it is not viewed in such a positive light in the NT:
Matthew 7:23 MKJV And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

1 John 3:4 MKJV Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.

So we see that lawlessness is not freedom, nor is it just the product of a bad upbringing, it is the nature of sin itself!

Lawlessness takes two main forms in society today. The first is overt criminality like that of Barabbas. The second is trying to live beyond the law like the rich and powerful and to philosophize away good and evil and conscience and God as outmoded things, no longer useful and to reduce all of life to a quest for power.

We thus see three choices here – the lawless life (Barabbas), the life under the law (the priests), and the Spirit-filled life under grace (Christ). Strangely the enmity is not between the first two, but between the last two! Wicked sinners and legalists need each other. But grace overthrows both of them!

The priests and their followers had a choice – between freeing lawlessness and releasing grace. The legalistic priests preferred Barabbas released – because he would just transgress again and be put back in his cage. But Christ released will overthrow them utterly. For he who lives by the Spirit is not under the law. (*Galatians 5:18*)

Did Barabbas repent? There is no mention of it. Grace seems to have been wasted.
Showing good to the wicked generally does not work. Isaiah puts it thus: *Isaiah 26:10* MKJV
Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of
uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of Jehovah.

Last Sunday's LA Times told the story of a predator who was given chance after chance to
change – and still persisted in his evil ways. The Barabbas types are simply and purely evil
and know no other mode of being.

There is evil in our midst; pure violent rebellious evil, and the Jews chose it instead of
Christ. Similarly there is evil in our hearts, and the decision to release it is a terrible one. It
may feel liberating, but you will be liberating a murderer.

Some Christians have been brought up under the law and they rebel. In their rebellion they
choose Barabbas – they decide lawlessness is better than confinement. This is because they
misunderstand grace. The love of Christ is better than any law and is ultimately more
liberating than any lawless act.

You may be contemplating some very sinful "act of liberation". Don't do it! But don't remain
under the law either! Discover grace in the face of Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior.
Discover the joy of living in the Holy Spirit and by faith.

Barabbas is not your friend. Christ is the lover of your soul.

Barabbas was freed as an act of pure spite. Pilate seems to have been amazed at the
choice. The mob did not really want Barabbas to be freed – they just wanted Jesus to be
crucified. In our attempts to "kill God" we inevitably release evil. German philosophers such
as Nietzsche said "God is dead and it is we who have killed Him" and their teaching
unleashed both Nazism and Communism. When we "kill God" in our society and ban Him
from the schools and the courts and even from the homes then unspeakable evil will
certainly be released. We will find all sorts of "liberation" occurring – that ends up being
lawlessness itself.

Then there are the consequences, what happened when the mob went home? Did they find
Barabbas lurking behind a tree with a knife in his hand?

Day 44 - John 19:1-5

BEHOLD THE MAN!

John 19: 1-5 MKJV Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and flogged Him. (2) And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and put it on His head. And they put a purple robe on Him, (3) and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck Him with their hands. (4) Then Pilate went out again and said to them, Behold, I bring him out to you so that you may know that I find no fault in him. (5) Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, Behold the man!

As far as I can make out verse five has been completely mistranslated in most modern translations and the word "Pilate" inserted. Here it is in the Literal Version and Young's Literal translation:

John 19:5 LITV Then Jesus came outside, wearing the thorny wreath and the purple mantle. And he said to them, Behold, the Man!

John 19:5 YLT Jesus, therefore, came forth without, bearing the thorny crown and the purple garment; and he saith to them, 'Lo, the man!'

Jesus is clearly the one saying, "Behold the Man!" and it completely changes the meaning of the whole verse. Instead of Pilate commending Jesus and sympathizing with Him it becomes a wry comment of Jesus to the howling mob in the nature of "Look at what you have done."

There is simply no warrant for adding "Pilate", it is not there in any Greek manuscript that I could consult, or the Textus Receptus or even in the Vulgate and there is no similar comment in the Synoptic gospels. As far as I can make out the literal translations are correct and the standard translations are flawed in this respect.

Jesus is the subject of the sentence and it is He who says, "Behold the Man!" Staring down from the balcony, crown of thorns on his head, with a royal robe Jesus says to them "Behold the Man"! It is both a rebuke and an invitation to salvation at the same time. He still offers them salvation – through the beholding of the wounds of Christ. Yet He makes it as plain as day that they are crucifying an innocent man, their King and the Son of God. Jesus is making them aware and responsible. He is saying, "Look at what you have done".

Jesus refers to Himself in the third person as "the Man" in a similar way to the way He refers to Himself in the third person as "the Son of Man" e.g. *John 13:31* MKJV Then when he (Judas) had left, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him.

Jesus is also inviting us to behold Him in His humanity - to in fact behold the humanity of the Son of God. Behold I am human – I bleed, I am whipped and scorned, I am not an impervious immortal, I am not a bulletproof Superman, I am wounded. I am human like you and I will suffer like you do and I will die as a man.

The Greek word used here for "man" is "anthropos" – human - and it is a word used for a category like "arthropods" or "monotremes". Its root meaning is "human-faced" humanity as a category of being separate from angels and animals. "Behold the Man" is perhaps best translated in this case as "Behold the Human". Here is Thayer's definition from E-Sword:

Thayer Definition - Anthropos:

- 1) A human being, whether male or female
- 1a) Generically, to include all human individuals
- 1b) To distinguish man from beings of a different order
 - 1b1) Of animals and plants
 - 1b2) Of from God and Christ
 - 1b3) Of the angels
- 1c) With the added notion of weakness, by which man is led into a mistake or prompted to sin
- 1d) With the adjunct notion of contempt or disdainful pity
- 1e) With reference to two fold nature of man, body and soul

In the bleeding whipped and wounded Christ we find God made vulnerable. God taking on humanity not just when it was convenient (like the Greek gods did who took the form of a man to fight a battle or seduce a woman) - but taking on humanity fully and completely until death.

When Jesus says "behold the human" He is clearly maintaining that He is a part of the normal human race - and this refutes the later Docetic heresy that maintained that He just appeared to be human.

Finally, it is good spiritual advice to behold the humanity and the wounds of Christ. There is enormous saving power in beholding the wounds of Christ "for by His stripes we are healed." The early Moravian missionaries that turned the world upside down were given two simple instructions "Preach the wounds of Christ" and "Tell the story of the Lamb." We need to spend time mediating on the cross of Christ and on the wounds of Christ. If you would like some help in this go to: <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/messiah/> and you will find a number of articles.

Lastly Jesus was not only wounded – He was arrayed in purple. Even the soldiers said" Hail, King of the Jews! (though in mockery). Pilate knew Jesus was different, that He was true royalty and so let the precious purple robe be put on His blood-soaked back. Jesus was human and He was the best of humans, our crowning glory and our King!

Day 45 - John 19: 6-9

JESUS SON OF GOD

John 19:6-9 MKJV Then when the chief priests and under-officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify! Crucify Him! Pilate said to them, You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in him. (7) The Jews answered him, We have a Law, and by our Law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. (8) Then when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid. (9) And he went again into the praetorium and said to Jesus, Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer.

The chief-priests and under-officers insist on the crucifixion of Christ and when Pilate asks why they say "We have a Law, and by our Law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." The charge that Jesus was the Son of God was also the accusation at the Sanhedrin (before Jesus was brought to Pilate).

Luke 22:67-71 MKJV Are you the Christ? Tell us. And He said to them, If I tell you, you will not believe. (68) Also if I ask you, you will not answer Me nor let Me go. (69) From now on the Son of Man shall sit at the right hand of the power of God. (70) And they all said, Are you then the Son of God? And He said to them, You say it, because I AM! (71) And they said, What need do we have for any witness? For we ourselves have heard it from his own mouth.

This was the outrage - that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. In the Scriptures the title "son of God" is applied to Adam (*Luke 3:38*), angels (*Job 2:1*), the nation Israel (*Exodus 4:22*) and the kings of Israel (*2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7*). Even born-again believers are said to become sons of God (*John 1:12*). So why is there a controversy? If Solomon can be a Son of God surely then "one greater than Solomon" (*Matthew 12:42*) can claim the title.

First, because there is a strong connection between being the Messiah, the Christ, also being the Son of God. This connection is made at least 17 times in the New Testament firstly with the confession of Peter and then as a standard confession of the early Church. Here are three examples from John's gospel:

John 6:68-69 MKJV Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life. (69) And we have believed and have known that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

John 11:27 MKJV She said to Him, Yes, Lord, I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.

John 20:31 MKJV But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.

In Acts, we see it as perhaps the earliest Christian creed:

Acts 8:37 MKJV Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, it is lawful. And he (the Ethiopian eunuch) answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Acts 9:20 MKJV And immediately he (Paul) proclaimed Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

Even the High Priest seems to have been aware of the claim that Jesus was "the Christ, the son of God." Matthew 26:63 ... "I adjure you by the living God that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."

The title Son of God seems to have potent spiritual connotations and implications: At the baptism of Jesus God designates as His Son – *"Matthew 3:17 MKJV And lo, a voice from Heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* It is God's specific identity for Jesus and this statement is even repeated from heaven at the Transfiguration. (Matthew 17:15)

On the other hand the Devil and his demons seemed to use this term in confrontations with Jesus e.g., *Matthew 4:3 MKJV And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If You are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

Mark 3:11-12 MKJV And unclean spirits, when they saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried, saying, You are the Son of God! (12) And He strictly charged them that they should not make Him known.

Those who passed by at the foot of the cross taunted Him with His title saying, in words parallel to those of Satan: *Matthew 27:40 ...If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

In contrast the centurion guarding Jesus acknowledge who He was: *Matthew 27:54 MKJV* But the centurion and those guarding Jesus, seeing the earthquake, and the things that took place, *they* feared greatly, saying, Truly this One was Son of God. Sons of gods (with human women) were common in Roman mythology – and were often legendary warriors such as Hercules – the son of Zeus and Leda. So when Pilate hears that Jesus claimed to be the son of God, he trembles. This was no ordinary man; this was a miracle worker with special powers. To crucify Him would be impious and bring down wrath. Pilate was so in awe of the title that he sought to release Jesus.

The title "son of God" definitely puts Jesus as a "divinized" human at least at the level of the angels, a messiah from God, someone to be reckoned with and believed in. From there it was a brief and natural step to see Jesus as THE Son of God, the unique, the only begotten - and from there to the doctrine of the Trinity. (For more on the Trinity see <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/trinity.htm>)

Jesus struck fear and awe into demons, Pilate and the high priest simply by being the Son of God. It is an awesome and fearful title of our Great King who is most worthy to be worshiped.

Day 46 - John 19: 10-15

NO KING BUT CAESAR

John 19:10-15 MKJV Then Pilate said to him, Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you? (11) Jesus answered, You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin. (12) From this time, Pilate sought to release Him. But the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar. (13) Then when Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement (but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha). (14) And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, Behold your king! (15) But they cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

Behold your King – we have no King but Caesar! And how true that became when, in 70 AD, the legions of Titus put an end to the Jewish nation and the temple and the Jews truly had “no king but Caesar”.

John’s Passion is full of dramatic moments brought about by the apostle’s use of juxtaposition – the dramatic technique of putting opposites next to one another for heightened contrast and effect. In my opinion John (under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost) is among the greatest scriptwriters of all time! And today/s verses are breathtaking.

They start with the question of authority. A conflicted and exasperated Pilate says:

“ Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you?” This is the positional authority of government and Jesus validates it when He says: “You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above.”

Government has legitimate authority over our lives, but it is not absolute, it is contingent – it is “from above” and God can make or break any ruler and any government. The statement of Jesus (in John 19:11) does not automatically make all forms and acts of government legitimate and must be taken in the context of the whole of the biblical revelation. We find in Scripture a wide range of responses to different kinds of government. God says different things to different kinds of administration and calls His Church to react in a wide variety of ways to the prevailing political climate.

Is the government generally seeking righteousness like that of Solomon so you can BLESS it like God did? (*1 Kings 3:5-15*)

Has it committed a specific wrong act so that it needs to be REBUKED like Nathan did to David? (*2 Samuel 12:1-14*)

Is it idolatrous and wicked like that of Ahab and Jezebel so you can OVERTHROW it like Elisha did? (*2 Kings 9:1-37*)

Is it stubborn and cruel so that you must LIBERATE people from it like Moses did? (Exodus chapters 1-15)

Is it a "good pagan" government like that of Nebuchadnezzar so that like Daniel you PARTICIPATE in the government and DEMONSTRATE the power of God to the ruler so he is converted (*Daniel 4*)?

Is it an efficient but unrighteous pagan government like Rome - with good law and order but hostile to God so you RESPECT the government but SEPARATE yourself from its wicked ways? (*Romans 13:1-8*)

If a government is corrupt we must never ally ourselves with it but rather EXPOSE it.. (*Psalms 94:20, Ephesians 5:11*)

Is it crafty and dangerous like the government of Herod so that you SAY NOTHING AT ALL and keep your distance like Jesus did? (*Luke 23:8-9*)

To sum up this section: There is no "one right way" to respond to all types of government. We have to discern the nature of the government and then react appropriately. The way to do this is to find a parallel situation in Scripture and then to ascertain how God spoke to it.

The Jews rebut Pilate's attempts to free their Savior with the statement: "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." Ultimately the Church "speaks against Caesar" with the statement "Jesus is Lord" and the end-times expectation of the manifest Kingdom of God:

Revelation 11:15 MKJV And the seventh angel sounded. And there were great voices in Heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He will reign forever and ever.

The stone cut without hands in Daniel 2 will smite the kingdoms of the nations and make them 'as fine dust' while the Kingdom of God fills the earth in their place. From Psalms to Revelation we see the Messianic expectation of the sole rule of God upon the earth. *Psalms 2:8-9 MKJV Ask of Me, and I shall give the nations for Your inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession. (9) You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

Whoever speaks of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the return of the Lord "speaks against Caesar" - which was a large part of the reason that the early Christians were persecuted by Rome. Even today China bans teaching on the Second Coming.

Thus Church and State will ALWAYS be in tension because the Church, if she is to be faithful, must be the bride of Christ - not the handmaiden of a politician. In most cases we can respect Caesar and pay taxes to the state - giving unto Caesar what is due unto Caesar and to God what is due unto God. (*Matthew 22:15-22*)

Yet all ultimate loyalty must be to God and we need to remind the State that it needs to fear God and remember that it rules by His appointment and can be removed at His say-so (*Daniel 4:17,25*). There are times when we may have to speak a prophetic word, and perhaps even accept martyrdom, particularly when the Anti-Christ is revealed. On the whole Christians are either too passive politically or are wrong-headed in their uncritical support of a particular person or party. We need to speak for God and the Church, issue-by-issue, moment-by-moment, according to the wisdom of God.

In the end the State always disappoints. Pilate caves in, and in the next verse he hands Jesus over to be executed. When dealing with Caesar, we need to remember that political realities tend to overcome truth, conscience and idealism. The State will honor the Church only up to the point that it is politically expedient to do so. After that point it will crucify us.

Day 47 - John 19:16-18

BEARING HIS CROSS

John 19:16-18 MKJV Then he delivered Him up to them that He might be crucified. And they took Jesus and led Him away. (17) And bearing His cross, He went out to a place called, The Place of a Skull (which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha) (18) where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle.

The action suddenly moves from the Praetorium to Golgotha with the barest mention of the Via Dolorosa. "And bearing His cross He went..." Pilate surrenders to the howling mob and lets Jesus be crucified. As a last gesture Pilate has the sign made saying that Jesus was the King of the Jews (more on that in the next Eternity DBS). And the chief priests and their attendants "took Jesus and led Him away". Evil had taken control.

For the righteous to fall into the power of the wicked is both unjust contrary to most teaching in the Old Testament which teaches that the righteous will always be delivered by God. Thus for the mob to be successful in crucifying Christ was tantamount to saying that God had lost control of the situation.

However God had not lost control, because three days later Jesus rose from the dead and did not remain in the power of the wicked, nor did His body see corruption and decay. God will deliver the righteous from the power of the wicked!

Today there was a terrible hostage crisis in Russia with terrorists taking children captive at a school and hundreds killed. Such evil seems so insane and so terrifying and so unjust that God "cannot have been in control". Certainly man was not in control, - the shoot-out was unplanned and brutal. It was frenzied evil – much the sort of out of control rage that the Pharisees seem to have been possessed by, just in a different context. And caught up in the dark terrorist maelstrom were Russian children on one hand, and the Son of God on the other. Mad, meaningless, murderous evil - it has to be factored into our human existence.

Jesus responded to the maelstrom by entering into it, in all its darkness and bearing His cross to Golgotha. Sometimes we have no choice but to suffer evil – and in such cases we must suffer to the glory of God as Christ did. I do not mean to glorify suffering, it is to be avoided, and biblical wisdom helps in avoiding unnecessary suffering. But suffering comes to all of us – and then what do we do? Do we join the rage? Do we sink into despair? Or do we bear our cross?

While John certainly portrays Jesus as being treated brutally and unjustly He makes no explicit mention of the personal sufferings of Christ or of His physical anguish. It is obvious that Jesus is humiliated, scourged, treated cruelly and crucified, but there are no morbid musings in the account. The cruelties are noted as occurring but are never described in any detail. We need to bear this in mind as the Passion DVD comes out this weekend.

Not only John but also the entire New Testament puts little emphasis on the personal sufferings of Christ and much greater emphasis on the saving work of Christ. The focus is not on Jesus' personal pain on the cross (which is never mentioned in any detail) but rather on Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension into Heaven to the right hand of God. This

saving work of Christ should be the main thing that we proclaim - for we do not have the sad and morbid faith of eternal victims – but a joyous and victorious faith of those who are “more than conquerors”.

“He went out to a place called, *The Place of a Skull* (which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha)”. There is quite an interesting debate about why it was called “the Skull” but you can look that one up in a Bible dictionary, we do not have space for it here. The point is that Golgotha was a place of death. There is even a tradition (Origen 185-253 AD) that it was the burial site of Adam, the first man and therefore the fitting place for the second Adam also. According to the ISBE: “The tomb and skull of Adam, still pointed out in an excavated chamber below the traditional Calvary, marks the survival of this tradition on the spot.”

“Where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle.” There were three people suffering the same terrible fate in three utterly different ways. If you have spent much time in hospital (as I unfortunately have in my missionary work) you will see very different reactions to suffering among people – even in the same ward. The angry seem to suffer twice as much - as not only the pain, but also their own rage tears them apart. And one of the thieves was angry and cursed God and abused Jesus and died in his own personal hell. The other thief made it to Paradise, the pain opened him up to repentance and faith and a moment of personal transformation.

Pain is merely a circumstance, a temporary physical sensation. We can learn from it, fight it, ignore it, dull it with alcohol or soothe it with sex. There is nothing automatically redemptive about pain. Pain teaches a few and destroys many. The angry thief suffered more and learned less. Fools suffer greatly. Masochism does not produce sanctification: “Colossians 2:23 ISV These things have the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, humility, and harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value against self-indulgence.” “and Jesus in the middle.” Where He always is! Jesus mid-way between earth and heaven, in the midst of two thieves, in the middle of suffering, dying humanity, in the middle of the crowd around the cross, in the middle of Israel, in the middle of the continents of the world. Jesus is always in the center of the circle. There is no ladder up to Jesus, He is right in the midst of you! (*Romans 10:6-8; Matthew 18:20*). We are all part of the circle around Christ and are either moving toward Him or moving away from him.

In Christ God came into our midst and He is still there, Immanuel, God with us. . In Christ God abolished the old “Jacob’s Ladder” approach of spirituality where we arduously climb a path of spiritual ascent. Now God is close to us, in our hearts and in our mouths, He is not far from any of us and in Him we live and move and have our being. (*Acts 17:27,28; Romans 10:6-8*)

Day 48 - John 19:19-22

THE SIGN OVER OUR LIVES

John 19:19-22 MKJV And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. (20) Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. (21) Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, the king of the Jews, but that he said, I am king of the Jews. (22) Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

You may have seen the letters INRI on the top of crosses. The initials, I.N.R.I., are from the Latin phrase, "Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdæorum," (The Latin "I" and "V" is the English "J" and "U" respectively) which means, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of Jews." This was the phrase Pilate penned and displayed over Jesus on the cross.

The sign was actually written in three languages – Hebrew, Greek and Latin the three main languages of the region, symbolizing the Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures, respectively. They were also "trade languages" understood by a wide range of people. But what was the significance of the sign? Some commentaries say that it was like a "charge sheet" and that crucified criminals had the crimes for which they were being committed hung over them. But no crime was hung over Jesus! Instead there was just a statement of His royalty. This not so indirectly pointed out the perfidy of the Jewish authorities. Thus the sign accused not Jesus – but the Jews.

This accusation was not lost on the Jewish authorities that seem to have formed a delegation to Pilate with an objection. "Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, the king of the Jews, but that he said, I am king of the Jews." Pilate stood his ground and answered: "What I have written I have written."

Pilate seems to have believed in the innocence of Jesus and in His claim to be the King of the Jews. Whether or not Pilate believed His claim to be the Son of God is unclear, but after Jesus' death a Roman centurion did. The Romans seemed to have grasped who Jesus was, while the Jews rejected Him. Perhaps that is why the headquarters of the Church inevitably moved from Jerusalem to Rome.

Signs are important. What would you want as a sign over your life? What would you want your headstone to say? For me I wish it to be something like: "A missionary who loved the Lord, spoke and wrote the truth and greatly extended the Kingdom of God." If you think about this exercise I hope you do not come up with phrases such as: "he owned a huge flat-screen TV" or "His house was the largest in town." As Jesus said, our lives are more than our possessions.

Luke 12:15 MKJV And He said to them, Watch and keep yourselves from covetousness. For a man's life is not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

Luke 14:33 MKJV So then, every one of you who does not forsake all his possessions, he cannot be My disciple.

We tend to walk around with invisible signs over us – our attitude, our posture and the way we relate communicate a clear message. We can almost see people's personal signs saying:

"I am powerful" or "Sexy girl" or "Don't mess with me". And over time we become expert at reading these invisible signs that other people are displaying. But rarely do we understand our own sign that we show the world.

What is the basic attitude and disposition of your inner being? Does your invisible personal sign that you carry around every day say "Jesus lives here" or does it say something else like "I am rich and important."

At the end of the day it is who we are, and what we have contributed to others that counts. That is our legacy. That is what we will be remembered for. The sign over Jesus' life said that He was a King, that His was a life lived royally and well and convincingly.

The sign exercise is a useful one to help you work out what you are really living for – and if that is worthwhile, and if it needs to be changed. What sign are you carrying now? What do you want it to be? How do you want to be remembered when you die?

Now we don't live for a human sign or a headstone – we live for God. It is how God sums up our life that counts. If we want His approval we must first become Christians, then live life in love in accordance with Christ's commandments. The God-pleasing life is not necessarily a religious life, but it is always an obedient life and a holy and set-apart life.

Back to the sign on the cross - the Jews wanted it changed. They wanted to re-label Jesus. This re-labeling of Jesus is a constant theme of the cults. They say Jesus was a "guru" or "just a prophet" or "a man of His times" and countless other things but God says, "I have written what I have written." The Bible tells us who Jesus really is – God's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

INRI summed up how Pilate saw Jesus – as a political entity, as Jesus from the town of Nazareth who was King of the Jews; a person with a place and a role. Pilate did not see beyond these externals for that something else is needed – the eye of faith.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 MKJV (16) So as we now know no one according to flesh, but even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we no longer know Him so. (17) So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

We are new creatures, unrecognizable to the world, but recognized in the Spirit. We know no one by the external life – name, place, appearance role and possession – but only as they are in the Spirit – and Paul says that applied even to Christ Himself. This is perhaps why there is no physical description of Jesus in the Scriptures. In the end it will be the sign of the Spirit, or the mark of the Beast, the fact that we are redeemed new creatures, is the only sign that matters.

Day 49 - John 19:23-27

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

John 19:23-27 MKJV Then when they had crucified Jesus, the soldiers took His garments and made four parts, one part to each soldier; and also His tunic. And the tunic was without seam, woven from the top throughout. (24) Therefore they said among themselves, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to find whose it shall be (that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says, "They parted my garments among them, and for my garment they cast lots"). Therefore the soldiers did these things. (25) And His mother stood by the cross of Jesus, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (26) Then when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, Woman, behold your son! (27) Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her into his own home.

There are three women named Mary in this passage: first there is Mary the mother of Jesus, the second Mary is the wife of Clopas, the father of the apostles James the Less and Joses (Matthew 10:3, 27:56, Mark 15:40). Clopas was, according to Eusebius, the brother of Joseph, the father of Jesus and so James the Less and Joses were thus cousins of Jesus. [Later on James the brother of Jesus also becomes an apostle meaning that many of the senior apostles were either brothers or cousins of Jesus.] The third woman called Mary is of course Mary Magdalene.

Even though a number of the apostles may have been relatives of Jesus along various family lines, this is never played on much in Scripture. They seem to lay no claim to it, which is perfectly in line with yesterday's passage about "recognizing Jesus according to the flesh".

2 Corinthians 5:16 MKJV (16) So as we now know no one according to flesh, but even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we no longer know Him so.

How we are born in this world is of no consequence, even if we are physically related to Jesus Christ – it is of no consequence, we must be born again. You may be aware of some of the recent mysticism surrounding the Merovingian bloodlines who became Kings of France from the 5th to 8th century AD and who are supposed to be the heirs of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. Apart from the blasphemy involved – it is of no consequence! It is NOT any sort of physical descent or bloodline or Grail inheritance that matters – but being born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul specifically warns folk not to get caught up in such Jewish fables and genealogies.

1 Timothy 1:3-7 MKJV Even as I begged you to remain at Ephesus, when I was going to Macedonia, that you might charge some that they teach no other doctrine, (4) nor to give heed to fables and endless genealogies (which provide doubts rather than the nurture of God in faith). (5) But the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, (6) from which some, having swerved, have turned aside to foolish talking, (7) desiring to be teachers of the law, neither understanding what they say nor that which they affirm.

Putting that to one side, let us press on. The soldiers cast lots for the seamless robe of Jesus in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy in Psalm 22:18. Psalm 22 was probably written

sometime around 1000 AD and forecasts the cross, in detail, a thousand years in advance. The foreknowledge of God reaches far into the future to predict a seemingly trivial event - soldiers casting lots for a robe. It is an act of callousness towards God, a seeking personal gain in the midst of the death of God's Son. The action reeks of grubby self-interest and a certain hardness towards suffering.

In contrast with this callousness is Jesus' consideration for His mother. "Then when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, Woman, behold your son! (27) Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her into his own home." It is interesting that Jesus always calls Mary "woman" (see also John 2:4) and never "mother". In fact He seems to go to some lengths to minimize this relationship.

Matthew 12:46-50 MKJV But while He yet talked with the people, behold, His mother and His brothers stood outside, desiring to speak with Him. (47) Then one said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brothers stand outside, desiring to speak with You. (48) And He answered and said to him who told Him, Who is My mother? And who are My brothers? (49) And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) For whoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.

For someone as loving as Jesus, who truly cared for His mother and her welfare, this term "woman" is very unusual, especially in His last words to her from the cross. This brings us back to our point about the physical relationship to Christ - even a relationship as close as that of His mother. She was just a woman, another believer who did the will of God. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit, knowing ahead of time the problems that would come with Mary worship, made sure that the Scriptures painted the very opposite picture.

Christianity is a spiritual Kingdom not a physical lineage. God's Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and is not inherited by flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 15:50). I do not care that George Bush and Dan Quayle are supposed to be of the Merovingian line and descendants of Jesus. That is utter codswallop! In God's eyes all that matters is the spiritual birth, being born from above, by the Holy Spirit - for God is impartial and is no respecter of persons.

Acts 10:34-35 KJV Then Peter opened *[his]* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Day 50 - John 19:28-30

It Is Finished!

John 19:28-30 MKJV After this, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, I thirst. (29) Then a vessel full of vinegar was set. And they filled a sponge with sour wine and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. (30) Then when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished! And He bowed His head and gave up the spirit.

Jesus drank the cup of suffering and when the last drop was done He cries out "It is finished!" This verb is in the perfect tense – meaning that it was completely finished for all time, an absolute terminus of the work of the cross.

Matthew Henry puts it well: Especially observe the dying word wherewith Jesus breathed out his soul. It is finished; that is, the counsels of the Father concerning his sufferings were now fulfilled. It is finished; all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, which pointed at the sufferings of the Messiah, were accomplished. It is finished; the ceremonial law is abolished; the substance is now come, and all the shadows are done away. It is finished; an end is made of transgression by bringing in an everlasting righteousness. His sufferings were now finished, both those of his soul, and those of his body. It is finished; the work of man's redemption and salvation is now completed. His life was not taken from him by force, but freely given up.

The writer to the Hebrews reinforces that the work of the cross was "once for all time" and is not a repeated work like the work of earthly priests.

Hebrews 7:26-27 MKJV For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens, (27) who does not need, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice daily, first for his own sins and then for the people's sins. For He did this once for all, when He offered up Himself.

Hebrews 9:11-14 MKJV But when Christ had become a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building (12) nor by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered once for all into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (13) For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, (14) how much more shall the blood of Christ (who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God) purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 10:10-12 MKJV By this will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (11) And indeed every priest stands daily ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down *on the* right of God.

The cross is a finished work that was done once for all people and for all time. It does not need to be repeated in the Mass. Christ is not crucified again (in Heaven) whenever the Mass is held as some believe. Ceremonies, which need to be repeated, do not deal with sin. The cross has dealt with sin, once, for all time, two thousand years ago.

This moment on the cross is the moment of the closing of the Old Testament and the bringing in of the New. When Jesus said, "It is finished" He was also speaking of the Old Covenant and the Jewish Law. Its provisions and its prophets were "until John" who was the last and greatest of the Old Testament saints (Matthew 11:11-13). Between John the Baptist and the cross was a strange period in which people "forced their way into" the Kingdom of God as the Old Covenant passed away. (See Matthew reference above) Then on the cross the "New Covenant in My blood" was sealed by His death and brought into being. (Matthew 26:28, 1 Corinthians 11:25, Hebrews 9:15)

The cross is the place where everything finishes – sin, sickness, law, condemnation, and all our pains, our iniquities and our grief. We die there with Christ. It is our cross also and our old nature is crucified with Christ. Through baptism we die and are buried with Christ that we might be raised to newness of life.

Romans 6:3-11 MKJV Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been joined together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection; (6) knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin. (7) For he who died has been justified from sin. (8) But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that when Christ was raised from the dead, He dies no more; death no longer has dominion over Him. (10) For in that He died, He died to sin once; but in that He lives, He lives to God. (11) Likewise count yourselves also to be truly dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Because of the cross we can count ourselves dead to sin and to the old life. It is finished. It is no longer "us". We have a new self, created in holiness and in the image of God, born from above by the living word of God.

(Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10, 1 Peter 1:23, John 3:3,7) Glory not in the old, but in the new. The flesh profits nothing.

(John 6:63) All the pomp of this world is dung. It is the Spirit that gives life. It is finished, old things have passed away, behold all things are new!

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 MKJV (16) So as we now know no one according to flesh, but even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we no longer know Him so. (17) So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Day 51 - John 19:31-37

THE ONE WHOM THEY PIERCED

John 19:31-37 ISV Since it was the Preparation Day, the Jews did not want to leave the bodies on the crosses during the Sabbath, for that was a particularly important Sabbath. So they asked Pilate to have the men's legs broken and the bodies removed. (32) So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with him. (33) But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. (34) Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water immediately came out. (35) The one who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true. He knows he is telling the truth so that you, too, may believe. (36) For these things happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "None of his bones will be broken." (37) In addition, another passage of Scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they pierced."

"The one who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true." John the apostle was there and saw these things and records them for us "so that you, too, may believe". The events of the cross were extraordinary - darkness and earthquakes and a sense of doom. The temple curtain torn in two, prophecies fulfilled as the ages turn on a hinge. It would seem like something from the Lord Of The Rings – except it really happened and John saw it with his own eyes and tells us about it.

Here we find the Scriptures being fulfilled in detail: "For these things happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "None of his bones will be broken." In addition, another passage of Scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they pierced." Apparently the breaking of the legs quickly suffocates the person on the cross as their lungs cannot suck in air under the weight of the person's body. It may also have placed lethal stress on the heart. The gruesome details are not that important.

Jesus did not suffer this fate as He had died, astonishingly quickly (Mark 15:44,45), because He had surrendered His Spirit to God.

God works His will through the ages and does His purposes right down to the last small detail. We can trust that the number of the Anti-Christ will be 666, and that Jesus will return in the clouds and that we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye because all the other prophecies, that have been fulfilled, have been fulfilled exactly and completely – and so these will also be fulfilled.

There are two amazing references in Scripture to "Him who they have pierced". One in Zechariah and another in the book of Revelation.

Zechariah 12:10 MKJV And I will pour on the house of David, and on the people of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of prayers. And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be bitter over Him, as the bitterness over the first-born.

Revelation 1:7 ISV Look! He is coming in the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. So be it! Amen.

This is a clear example of the double fulfillment of a prophecy. In the first fulfillment on the cross the Jews and the Romans looked on Jesus with the blood and water flowing out of His side as "one whom they had pierced". Later when Jesus returns on the clouds every eye shall see Him – even those (Jews and Romans) who pierced the side of Jesus.

In Zechariah those who pierce Jesus are plainly Jews – the house of David. But the people who actually did the work were Roman soldiers! But they did it at the insistence of the Jews (John 19:31), so it is not unfair to say that the Jews pierced Christ.

In Revelation, (written in 90-95 AD, well after the demise of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD) it seems the main emphasis is on Rome and Constantinople (both cities built on seven hills) and so the one's doing the piercing in Revelation 1:7 may be Romans – or the spiritual descendants of the Roman Empire – the West!

The same prophecy applies on the cross, and in the return of the Lord and to both Jews and Gentiles. Some prophecies such as Isaiah 7:14 may have even three or more fulfillments. They become ever-expanding spiritual principles.

One good example is God's word to Abraham: Genesis 12:3 MKJV And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

This prophecy applied to Abraham as an individual, then to his family, then to the nation of Israel, then to Christ and then to the Church "Galatians 3:29 MKJV And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."

This is at least a five-fold fulfillment! If you believe it also applies even to the modern state of Israel that would make a sixth fulfillment.

All Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Christ, some seem to "stop at the cross" and go no further (e.g. not a bone of His body will be broken) other are carried forward to the Church Age and the Return of Christ e.g. "they shall look upon Him who they pierced". The whole Law stops at the cross (Romans 7:1-11) but knowledge (wisdom) and prophecy continue until the return of Christ when they too shall pass away in the perfect knowledge of God. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13) The word of God is accurate, precise and true – and eternal. God will do His will and fulfill His Word and we can count on that.

THE BODY OF JESUS

John 19:38-42 MKJV And after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews) begged of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave permission. Then he came and took the body of Jesus. (39) And Nicodemus also came, who at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. (40) Then they took the body of Jesus and wound it with linens with the spices, as is the custom of the Jews to bury. (41) And in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed. (42) There, then, because of the Preparation of the Jews, because the tomb was near, they laid Jesus.

Today's Eternity-DBS will be a little longer than usual because I wish to put to tackle British Israelite-ism, and some of the Bible Code humbug that has recently become popular and erodes the faith of many - and which have Joseph of Arimathea as a central character. You may skip the "historical stuff" and go to the devotional at the end if you prefer.

[Historical Stuff begins..]

(1) These legends tend to have Joseph of Arimathea as a central character and cast him as an uncle of Mary (and thus of Jesus) who took Jesus to England as a child (on business trips) and returned in 63 AD (with Mary Magdalene) and the Holy Grail to found an oratory and monastery at Glastonbury and thus started Christianity in England. Lets look at some facts - Joseph of Arimathea is already a senior member of the Sanhedrin in 29 AD when he receives the body of Jesus. That means he is at least 40 (for admittance to the Sanhedrin) and probably 50 or more. In 63 AD he would be about 80. I don't think an 80 year old man would get up to all the missionary adventures he is credited with in Glastonbury.

(2) There is no credible church historian that I know of who agrees with these legends.

(3) The legends are distinctly nationalistic and frequently racist in character as if God had national preferences. This is clearly contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, Romans 10:12)

(4) They involve paganistic views of the Holy Grail and other "magic objects" such as Joseph's staff that sprouts and turns into a tree atop Allweary Hill.

(5) The fruit of British Israelite-ism is, and has always been, bigotry and spiritual disaster. At best it is a distraction, at worst it is a destructive heresy. Spiritual growth comes from humility, love and a focus on the cross of Christ – not on racial pride.

(6) Such conspiracy theories and notions tend to replace the Scriptures with mystical humbug and lead people astray from the Truth that is in Christ. Moreover they regard some populist historian as having more insight than the people who put the Canon together in the early Church – who were much closer to the facts.

That said – both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are interesting characters in their own right. Here is a little about them, the first is from John Gill's Exposition Of The Entire Bible, the second is from the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) Nicodemus; frequent mention is made of "Nicodemon ben Gorion", the brother of Josephus ben Gorion (p), the writer of the Wars and Antiquities of the Jews; and there are some things which make it probable, that he was the same with this Nicodemus; for the Nicodemon the Jews speak so much of, lived in this age; as appears, not only from his being the brother of Josephus, but also from his being contemporary with R. Jochanan ben Zaccai, who lived in this time, and until the destruction of the temple;... he (Nicodemus) is represented as very rich, and is said to be one of the three rich men in Jerusalem (r), and who was able to have maintained a city ten years.

Joseph of Arimathea (apo´ Arimathei´as; for etymology, etc., of Joseph, see general article on JOSEPH): Joseph of Arimathea - a place the locality of which is doubtful, but lying probably to the Northwest of Jerusalem - was a "rich man" (*Mat 27:57*), "a councilor of honorable estate," or member of the Sanhedrin (*Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50*), "a good and righteous man ... who was looking for the kingdom of God" (*Luke 23:50; Mark 15:43*), and "himself was Jesus' disciple" (*Mat 27:57; John 19:38*). Although he kept his discipleship secret "for fear of the Jews" (*John 19:38*), he was yet faithful to his allegiance in that he absented himself from the meeting which found Jesus guilty of death (compare *Luke 23:51; Mark 14:64*). But the condemnation of his Lord awakened the courage and revealed the true faith of Joseph. On the evening after the crucifixion he went "boldly" to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. There is a fine touch in that he himself took down the body from the cross. With the assistance of Nicodemus he wound it in fine linen with spices (compare *Mat 27:57*, Joseph was a "rich man") and brought it to the new sepulcher in the garden near the place of His crucifixion. There they "laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain" and 'rolled a stone against the door of the tomb' (compare *Mat 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42*). In this was held to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa 53:9. [Historical Stuff ends.]

From all of the above we can see that both Nicodemus and Joseph were very wealthy. The one hundred pounds of spices would have been very expensive on its own. At say \$5 an ounce (cheap for perfume and spices) it would be around \$8000. It was a lavish and considerate burial in a fine grave, in which no-one had yet laid, it was the burial of a Prince, or of the King of The Jews.

The growth in courage of both Joseph and Nicodemus is recorded here. Joseph was a secret disciple as was Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night before (John 3:1-18). Now they are seen boldly asking Pilate for the body of Jesus. Their days of secrecy are over, and extra-biblical sources have them being persecuted by the Jews, even bankrupted and driven out of Jerusalem and buried in common graves. It was costly to oppose the Sanhedrin – their own group, and to honor the One the High Priests had crucified.

John's account also puts to rest the Swoon Theory – which Jesus "just appeared to be dead". In this account Jesus is wrapped in linen cloths with the spices placed between the layers of linen. An air-tight, extremely pungent and absolutely suffocating arrangement. A similar arrangement (a wet cloth on the face) ensured the death by suffocation of the

King of Syria (2 Kings 8:15). If Jesus had "swooned" He would not have survived the burial procedure!

On another level we can see that "the body of Christ deserves the best". The Church is now the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) and should be honored in all her manifestations – as local churches, house churches, cathedrals, mission stations, home groups and wherever believers meet as called out ones.

"And in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed." Jesus was crucified in or near a garden! We often see pictures of Jesus being crucified atop a barren hill. But it seems it was not the actual case. The body was simply taken off the cross and placed in a tomb in the memorial garden.

The tomb was near the cross. It was convenient to move the body of Jesus there before sunset and the start of the Day of Preparation (Jewish days start at sunset), as Jesus died in the late afternoon some time after 3 PM. The place of resurrection is often close to the place of death. When we are hit hard by life and die inwardly, it is often exactly where we are "buried" that we rise.

Finally the ancient prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled:

Isaiah 53:9 MKJV And He put His grave with the wicked, and with a rich one in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Jesus was the pure and innocent King of the Jews. Such a one could not stay dead, could not stay wrapped in linen and buried in myrrh and aloes. Here was spiritual power, seemingly motionless, but working a great redemption. It is interesting to note that the three points we most celebrate in Jesus life were times He was unable to lift a finger.

The birth when He was wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes, the cross where the nails held Him down and the resurrection where Jesus was dead, buried and wrapped in grave clothes. Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46:10)

Day 53 - John 20:1-10

THE RIDDLE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

John 20:1-10 MKJV The first of the sabbaths Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, darkness still being on it, and she saw the stone taken away from the tomb. (2) Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. (3) Therefore Peter and that other disciple went forth and came to the tomb. (4) So they both ran together. And the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb. (5) And stooping down he saw the linens lying, yet he did not go in. (6) Then Simon Peter came following him and went into the tomb. And he saw the linens lying there. (7) And the grave-cloth that was on His head was not lying with the linens, but was wrapped up in one place by itself. (8) Therefore, then, that other disciple also went in, the one who came first to the tomb. And he saw and believed. (9) For as yet they did not know the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead. (10) Then the disciples went away again to themselves.

As a young boy I used to devour Enid Blyton's children's novels about the Secret Seven and the Famous Five. The kids would discover a treasure or find out about a jewel robbery and solve the mystery. There was always much discussion among the heroes about the significance of events, or what this clue or that clue meant, and the kids were all firm friends. Today's verses have that same air of puzzled friends working together to solve a big mystery that they know is very important. So we will call it: The Riddle Of The Empty Tomb.

First come the girls who discover the mystery – Jesus is not there, the tomb is empty. So they run back and tell the boys, who acting just like boys, don't believe them - then have a foot race to see who can get there first. John, the youngest disciple, wins over Big Peter.

Mary's dramatic opening line: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." - would have galvanized everyone into action. They ran with pounding adrenalin and then saw an odd sight - neatly folded grave clothes. If the soldiers or grave robbers had stolen the body they would hardly have removed the sticky myrrh and aloe soaked grave clothes and neatly folded up all the linen wrappings. They would simply pick up Jesus body, grave clothes and all and moved Him. Or they would tear off the grave clothes and leave a mess behind. There they were in two neat piles – one of the wrappings, and another of the face cloth. As far as I can make out there seem to be three different sets of cloths – a main shroud mentioned in Mark, a large linen sheet. Underneath this would have been wrappings going around the body with ointment between the layers of the wrappings. Then another wrapping seems to have gone over the head.

The shroud would have covered them all. After reading a few books I think, on balance of the evidence, that the Shroud of Turin may well be the burial cloth of Jesus. Anyway, the mystery at this point has two components: Who moved the stone? (Mark 16:3) And John's implied question - Who removed the grave clothes and folded them? John does not mention the stone or the angel but focuses on the piles of cloths because they are what caused him to believe. This was done not by an enemy – who would have scattered things, but by a friend who carefully put them by. The tomb would have smelled of myrrh. And the question would have hung in the air:- Who did this? And why? Why remove the wrappings? What

would anyone want with a beaten and crucified human body? The Jews wanted Jesus sealed up and so did the Romans. Where did the guard go? And who dared to break the Roman seal? This was unusual, even supernatural, an X-files moment. There are times when something "normal" like neatly folded grave clothes can be the spookiest thing of all. Like coming back home and seeing your husband smoking his pipe when you were certain he was killed in a plane crash. Normal can be shocking.

"And he saw and believed." John saw the grave cloths and somehow knew that Jesus was up, and His Spirit was about and things were happening again, just like before. John, who was particularly close to Jesus, knew, in his inner being, that He was no longer dead. The sort of things that Jesus did, were heaping again, it had to be Him!

"For as yet they did not know the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead."

The resurrection of the Messiah is quite hidden in the Old Testament and it took Jesus' teaching session on the Emmaus Road later that day to make things plain to them. Isaiah 53:10, Job (Job 14:13-15; Job 19:25-29), a few Psalms (Psalm 17:15; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 49:15; Psalm 73:24,) and Daniel 12:2 may be among the Scriptures that Jesus used.

"Then the disciples went away again to themselves." They went back to the group and to their own reflections and puzzled over these things. Finally reports of Jesus' appearance, and His standing in their midst, convinced them of the truth of the matter. Jesus always taught His disciples to have what I call a "verifiable faith". A faith based on personal experience or on the testimony of two or three reliable witnesses.

Philosophers call this "inter-subjective testability" – is that a number of subjects (people) can, at least in theory, test the truth or falsity of the proposition. If I say: "there is now water in the dry creek-bed" then a number of folk can go and check and verify that it is so. However if I say: "Last night I dreamt of pink elephants in white tutus" – that is untestable. No one can say whether that is true or false. That is why the Scriptures tell us not to rely too much on dreams and visions (Colossians 2:8 following).

The empty tomb was verified by a number of witnesses. The post-resurrection sightings were seen by over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:5,6) thus establishing these claims - and the body of Jesus was never produced by the Jews. The key points of the Christian faith are inter-subjectively testable – which is why there are four gospels not just one! We have a faith that checks out when examined by historians, archaeologists and linguists. The excellent Evidence That Demands A Verdict series by Josh McDowell is very helpful in this regard.

MARY AT THE TOMB

John 20:11-18 MKJV But Mary stood outside of the tomb, weeping. And as she wept, she stooped down into the tomb. (12) And she saw two angels in white sitting there, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. (13) And they said to her, Woman, why do you weep? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. (14) And when she had said this, she turned backward and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. (15) Jesus said to her, Woman, why do you weep? Whom do you seek? Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away from here, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away. (16) Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned herself and said to Him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Master!) (17) Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father. But go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and your God. (18) Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that He had spoken these things to her.

Peter & John miss the obvious – two angels and Jesus! Somehow they just saw the empty tomb and the grave clothes. But Mary stands outside the tomb weeping, it does not say for how long, but she is there, distraught with grief. Her tears seem to open Heaven, the angels appear, and Jesus talks to her.

The angels, and Jesus, ask exactly the same question: "Woman, why do you weep?" God seems to always be asking people why they are acting or reacting in certain ways (e.g. Genesis 4:6, Exodus 14:15, Joshua 7:10, Mark 4:40). This question (why do you...) is one way that God draws out the contents of the human heart and teaches people a lesson. It is also unpresumptuous and does not pretend to know why someone is reacting a certain way. We often misread a reaction thinking it is because of A or B when actually it is because of something else entirely. It does not hurt to take a few moments to genuinely ask: "Why are you crying" – and thus share the graciousness of God, Jesus and the angels.

Mary's answer was her concern for Jesus. "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Mary was weeping because she had lost Jesus, her Lord. The idea of "losing Jesus" may seem strange to us who just see Jesus as a heavenly figure. But Jesus was Mary's friend, Savior and Lord and He had a physical body and Mary wanted to care for it. Jesus was tangible for Mary.

Jesus needs to be much more than an idea in a book. He needs to be a real person that we know personally, through the Spirit. Jesus is not a mere doctrine, to be argued over – one nature or two, part of the Trinity or not (though these things are important), Jesus is a living Spirit, a life-giving Spirit, (1 Corinthians 15:45) that we need to come to know and have dwell within us.

"I will take Him away" – an impossible feat for Mary alone, but devotion sees nothing as impossible. Out of love for God many 'attempt the impossible' – and succeed.

"Jesus said to her, Mary!" God calls us by name. The first word that Jesus spoke after the resurrection was the name of a human being – Mary. The age of the resurrection is an age of personal communion between God and us.

"She turned herself and said to Him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Master!)" Rabboni is the Aramaic/Chaldean version of Rabbi and means "honorable sir/great one" and was used of certain teachers in Jesus' day. None of Mary Magdalene's terms of address to Jesus imply marriage or physical intimacy; they are all formal terms of respect.

"Do not touch Me". Jesus backs away from Mary's embrace. His post-resurrection body was in such a form that it should not be touched. "for I have not yet ascended to My Father."

"But go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and your God." Jesus refers to the disciples as His brothers (see next verse). This is in line with the following Scriptures:

Matthew 12:49-50 MKJV And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) For whoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.

Hebrews 2:11-13 MKJV For both He who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, (12) saying, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." (13) And again, "I will put My trust in Him." And again, "Behold Me and the children whom God has given Me."

Since the resurrection all born-again believers are brothers of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself defines this relationship by saying: "to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and your God." Nothing could be easier - we have the same Father as Jesus – therefore we are brothers, and that Father is God, the same God as that of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection and ascension have put New Covenant Christians on an entirely different spiritual level to Old Covenant Jews. Now, due to God's grace (not our goodness) we are made sons of God, brothers of Jesus, and citizens of Heaven with access to the Throne of God, via the Holy Spirit who now dwells personally in us. We are literally seated in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus (*Ephesians 2:6,7; 1:20*).

When Jesus says: "to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and your God" He is allowing the disciples into the family and household of God. (*Ephesians 2:19*) Thus the Lord's Prayer starts with the revolutionary words "Our Father."

"Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that He had spoken these things to her." Mary does what Jesus told her to do. A simple enough job, but she was the first witness to the Resurrection, the one who witnessed to the apostles. Middle Eastern culture did not validate the witness of a woman – but Jesus did. The Samaritan woman at the well was the first to give witness to His Messiah-ship, and Mary Magdalene was the first to give witness to the Resurrection.

Mary simply told others what she had seen and heard and what Jesus had said to her. That is always a good starting point! Tell others what you have personally experienced of Jesus – and what He has said to you.

Day 55 - John 20:19-23

RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 20:19-23 MKJV Then the same day at evening, being the first of the sabbaths, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, Peace to you! (20) And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (21) Then Jesus said to them again, Peace to you. As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you. (22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) Of whomever sins you remit, they are remitted to them. Of whomever sins you retain they are retained.

It is Sunday evening in Jerusalem, the doors are shut for fear of the Jews and Jesus materializes in their midst in solid form, and (in the other gospels) eats some broiled fish and a honeycomb (Luke 24:42). Jesus resurrection body seems to be both solid enough to eat fish and insubstantial enough to pass through walls. It is the same body of Jesus that was on the cross and in the grave, and it still bore the nail marks.

It was not a different body but rather was the same body in a changed state. In His resurrected form Mary was not allowed to touch Him (but Thomas was), He could materialize in a room or suddenly vanish as on the Emmaus Road. It was a spiritually changed body and His breath could even impart the Holy Spirit. For more on the nature of the resurrection body read 1 Corinthians 15.

This is a commissioning service for the Eleven. It involves:

A blessing "Peace be with you" (repeated twice),

A reminder of the Cross - and the cost of discipleship "And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side."

A solemn commissioning "As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you."

An empowering for service "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit."

And a delegated range of authority: "Of whomever sins you remit, they are remitted to them. Of whomever sins you retain, they are retained."

These five things should be present in every sending out of a Christian worker. No one should go out without a blessing, or without being reminded of the cost, or a solemn charge to service, or the power of the Holy Spirit or a clearly delegated range of spiritual authority.

This was not an elaborate ceremony. It was not held in a church or a synagogue and no high-powered religious authority was present. It was just a band of brothers, in the presence of God. The sending of Paul and Barnabas was similarly informal:

Acts 13:1-3 MKJV And in Antioch some among the existing church were prophets and teachers. (such as Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. (2) As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them. (3) Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they let them go.

Here also was a band of spiritual brothers, leading a church together, when God said "send these two as missionaries from your church" and they were prayed for, hands were laid on them, and off they went. This is all that is needed in apostolic work.

While all five aspects mentioned above are important, the one I will focus on today is the command "Receive Holy Spirit" (a literal translation). There is an important receiving of the Holy Spirit that allows us to minister in the same manner that Jesus ministered – and all four gospels and Acts testify to this. "As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you." - requires anointing. Jesus was anointed, so must be His apostles. In addition Luke says they must be "clothed with power from on high", Mark says they were to do signs and wonders, Matthew says they are to operate in authority and Acts testifies to Pentecost and to the powerful miracles of the early Church. Because of the Holy Spirit we are to do "greater works":

John 14:12-13 MKJV Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Since Christian workers are sent in the same manner as Jesus is sent, to do His works and even greater works, then we require His anointing – the powerful baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Without the power of the Holy Spirit we are little better than some New Age philosopher in our ability to tangibly transform people's lives.

Jesus did not send out the apostles to be "nice encouragers" or even to be psychotherapists. Nor did He commission them to pray in solitude and be quietly holy. The apostles were sent to do works of power and spiritual authority that glorify God – and frankly that is quite scary. I do not pretend to have an extraordinarily powerful anointing, - I have had "bursts" of supernatural power, and seen some healed and quite a number delivered. Yet I would much rather study Hebrew and write academic papers. But God calls us to a more strenuous spirituality than that.

We tend to substitute some much more controllable power for the power of the Holy Spirit – such as brainpower, personality power, organizational power, political power, even financial and computing power – anything that will "get the job done" without God having to turn up. This is because we are terribly uncertain that God would turn up for us.

We need to look our doubt and unbelief and spiritual nervousness and inferiority in the eye and stare it down and master it. We cannot let these things dictate how we minister; we have to find the courage to rely on God the Holy Spirit. (Now I freely admit that is easier for me to write than for you to do.) Reliance on the Holy Spirit is easier in one on one, or small group situations, where there is less peer pressure and expectation.

Now I am not saying that you have to do lots of "weird" stuff to be truly ministering as Jesus ministered and for you to be sent as He was sent. But you should know that you are anointed of God, even if your anointing is as wobbly as mine is. (Please pray that it gets more powerful). You should have a sense that you are doing what Jesus would do in your situation and that you do it in the power of God.

THOMAS BELIEVES

John 20:24-31 MKJV But Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I shall see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. (26) And after eight days the disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace to you! (27) Then He said to Thomas, Reach your finger here and behold My hands; and reach your hand here and thrust it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing. (28) And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God! (29) Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed. (30) And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. (31) But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.

Thomas is both one of the more loyal and complex disciples. Thomas was the only one prepared to die with Christ in John 11:15,16, and yet he seems to have found the death of Jesus intolerable and overwhelming. He went deep into grief, isolated himself and refused to rekindle his hopes that had been so terribly crushed – even when the others told Thomas about the resurrection. Easton's Bible Dictionary has Thomas, Matthew and James as sons of Alphaeus and thus brothers - which might explain Matthew's phrase 'some doubted' (Matthew 28:17) as referring to his twin brother – without using his name.

Jesus gave Thomas a chance to believe 'without seeing' and thus of inheriting a greater blessing (John 20:29), but even after a week he was still adamant in his unbelief. So Jesus gave Thomas the evidence that he needed to believe – and Thomas gave the greatest statement of faith in the whole NT "My Lord and My God".

It is not wrong to need solid evidence before making a major change of belief system such as believing that someone could rise from the dead. God leads us to a reasonable and verifiable faith and does not ask us to believe myths and fairy stories. Therefore the Bible is full of history and other readily verifiable information.

Thomas was not asked to have "blind faith" or to believe in a fairy story but rather to trust the witness of the other apostles who he knew well. As I mentioned the other day this is known as inter-subjective testability and means that an event that can be tested by a number of people – such as the 500 that saw Jesus alive (1 Corinthians 15:5,6) is deemed far more credible than one that cannot pass such a test.

In the normal course of life we cannot test everything ourselves and we have to rely on the word of others – such as teachers and textbooks and panels of experts. Thus all education relies on trust in the veracity of the teacher. For instance I think I first heard about the massive Amazon River when I was in grade three. I believed that the Amazon River existed and was the biggest river in the world because my teacher said so. My teacher in turn probably trusted an atlas or a textbook, which in turn was probably compiled by an expert who in turn may have relied on someone in Brazil who has actually seen the Amazon River.

To this day I have no absolute first-hand proof of the existence of the Amazon River, but despite this I believe that it exists because I have faith in atlases and experts who tell me it exists. Now this applies to countless other facts that I have learned in the course of my education. Thus all education, indeed all civilization and culture, depends on inter-subjective testability – on being able to trust the verifiable testimony of a number of reliable witnesses.

Even when we come up with a doctrinal conclusion we should ask: "Does this fit reality? Can this be tested and verified by a number of reliable witnesses?" For instance if we say concluded that: "All truly spiritual people speak in tongues" and went out to test that proposition, we would be in for a shock as Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Bill Bright and Charles Haddon Spurgeon and many others failed to fit the theory. Such a theory would fail to fit the test of reality. The prosperity gospel and many other theories would also crash in a heap if a little reality testing was done, and this would be a good thing.

None of us have seen Jesus' hands and side, so we have to trust the witness of the apostles and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as well the ample historical evidence such as Morrison's "Who Moved The Stone" or the works of Josh McDowell. God works with the available evidence to help us to believe.

John wrote his gospel, as an eyewitness account of a credible witness, so that we might have sufficient data to believe but even John admits it was only a sufficient account not an exhaustive account. "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name."

God rarely provides us with absolute proof for our faith, but He always provides sufficient and adequate proof based on the written testimony of a number of reliable and credible eyewitnesses. This testimony is first of all found in the Gospels and Acts.

Where there is no such evidence (by a number of reliable eyewitnesses) we are not required to believe. We are not required to believe in a flat-earth or in televangelists or in conspiracy theories. However we are required to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. (Romans 10: 9,10).

Day 57 - John 21:1-6

THE BIG CATCH - Part 1

John 21: 1-6 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately [1] got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

Today's passage extends from verse 1 to 14 so we will break it into two natural halves and just do verses 1 to 6 today.

A group of seven disciples go fishing among them "Nathanael of Cana in Galilee" – perhaps it was Nathanael's wedding they all attended in John chapter 21. Four are missing, but Thomas is back with them.

At Peter's behest they went fishing and "that night they caught nothing". I once spent a few weeks in a Papua New Guinean fishing village about two hours from Port Moresby – and there they also fished at night, not during the day. The produce was then brought in to market in the morning, sold, then later in the day the nets were prepared and the whole thing began again. There was almost no time for sleep.

"They caught nothing" - Every time I have tried to augment my ministry income with a business sideline I have "caught nothing". God wants me in the ministry and He won't let me stray! Peter and company were going fishing to earn a bit of pocket money and get the old business back again. There is archaeological evidence of a major "Sons of Zebedee" fishing business on Lake Galilee but whether it was the actual disciples business has not been proved.

Jesus had just told them "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" but it evidently had not sunk in. They were going back to business and needed to be taught a lesson. Peter was still full of shame (see verses 7-14) and was hanging back and everyone else was also hanging back with Peter their leader. Jesus needed to close off the fishing possibility with finality, recommission Peter, and then get the disciples back over their doubts and back into action.

So Jesus meets them in their tired, hungry, exhausted state after the fishing trip. He asks the question that He knows will annoy any fisherman "have you caught anything" and He asks it as "have you any food". Seven grumpy disciples answer Him curtly "No". Jesus, probably grinning from ear to ear, says "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." – they obey, and catch a huge quantity of fish.

This triggers Peter's response, which we will look at tomorrow. Today lets look at the obvious – God's blessing brings more results in an instant than human effort can ever accomplish on its own.

Joseph worked hard to get promoted and just ended up in jail, but in a moment was made Prime Minister of Egypt.

The woman with the hemorrhage spent all her money on doctors – and was healed in an instant.

Esther went from an unknown Jewish girl to becoming Queen in a single day.

Daniel went from an obscure Jewish lad to Nebuchadnezzar's right hand man in an afternoon because he interpreted a dream.

Unblessed human effort goes nowhere – even if it is well intended and “on the right track”. Moses could not free the Israelites until he relied totally on God.

This is not to say that we should sit in an armchair and wait for God to do it all. The shoemaker's elves (that built the shoes at night while the shoemaker slept) are not part of biblical lore! The disciples did end up working – and working hard as they pulled the net to shore. But they worked after God, and with God, not instead of God.

God created the Universe from “a handful of nothing” and He can create amazing things in our life as well. Acts 3:12 is Peter's summary about human efficacy: So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

The miraculous has nothing to do with our own power or piety but it does involve us. If Peter and John had remained silent and not said “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” the miracle would never have occurred. And if the disciples had not thrown their net on the right side of the boat – they would have not caught the fish.

What is the secret to a Big catch in ministry? First, listen to God! Obey His directions not your own calculations. Second, cast His nets when and where He says. Third, – use all your might to pull them in! Follow-up is ninety percent of the effort of evangelism. Lazy ministers of the gospel leave all the fish in the net. Use your technology, your web site, your radio program or your tracts – but after God as spoken and only at His direction.

THE BIG CATCH - Part 2

John 21:7-14 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. (8) But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. (9) Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. (10) Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." (11) Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three, and although there were so many, the net was not broken. (12) Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"-- knowing that it was the Lord. (13) Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. (14) This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

The number 153 has everyone curious. It adds up to 9 (1 + 5 + 3) and mathematically it is nine times seventeen and it is also the sum of the whole numbers from one to seventeen – that is 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 all the way to 17. Here are some other explanations:

- The word fish in Greek is 'ixthus' which has a numerical equivalent of 1224, or 8 x 153. - The fish was a symbol of Jesus (see below)
- 153 people received a blessing from Jesus in the four gospels (not counting the 5000 and examples like that).
- There were supposed to be 153 species of fish in the ancient world. Thus 153 represent all different kinds of people.

Others see it as an example of Hebrew gematria – word play using numbers, to quote one source:

Various words associated with fishing have gematria divisible by 153: "fishes" has a value of 153×8 , "the net" has the same 153×8 value, "multitude of fishes" is 153×16 , "fishers of men" is 153×14 , "casting a net into the sea" is 153×20 , etc. According to biblewheel.com some bible phrases in the original Hebrew have a gematria value of 153, e.g., "I am the Lord thy God", "the Passover", "He is faithful", "he shall cause to inherit" and "sons of God". This is more than coincidence.

The Diocletian persecution was raging at the time John wrote his gospel and the symbol of the "fish" for Christ was in wide use. The Greek word for fish was Ixthus and Ixthus was an acronym (abbreviation using initials, e.g., IBM) and stood for Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior (in Greek Iesus, Xristos, Theos, Uios, Sotier.)

So "153 fish" takes the "theological attributes" of 153 (Sons of God, I am the Lord thy God, etc.) and adds them to the fish which was well known as the symbol of Jesus Christ. It was a way of saying Jesus, Son of God, Savior, Passover, I am the Lord thy God, etc during the Diocletian persecution that had John imprisoned on Patmos. As John was known as the apostle to the persecuted church, and was often cryptic in his communication this makes some sense.

So if anyone asks you "what do the 153 fish mean" you can say – it's a cryptogram for Jesus being God.

Fishing with a dragnet (like the disciples used) was also a type of the end of the age: Matthew 13:47-50 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away." So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now on to the rest of the passage: The seven apostles bring the 153 fish to the resurrected Savior who has a fire burning – with bread and fish already on it. The fire is a fire of coals – typically used for purification and associated with Isaiah's call and cleansing (Isaiah 6). Fire is also strongly associated with the Holy Spirit. Bread and fish brings to mind the feeding of the 5000, also the first resurrection meal was some bread on the Emmaus Road and a "piece of broiled fish" among the disciples.

This is a time of purification and rededication, a time of going back to their original calling as "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18,19) purified by the fire of the Holy Spirit and the broken body of Christ symbolized in the bread and the fish. Thus the occasion is loaded with meaning and "they knew it was the Lord".

Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." – an invitation to simple fellowship that could not be refused by hungry (and perplexed) fishermen. Jesus often invites us to simple things, to a small church, to a plain preacher, to a bible study in a home with good, godly folk. Yet He will also invite us to a wedding feast. Peter has to eat with Jesus, feel accepted and get over his shame.

He had jumped in the water, he feels unworthy and it will take a chat with Jesus to set him right again but Peter is on his way, he is now eating with the Savior.

"And yet the net was not broken" – how can we cope with so many converts? The net will not break – pull it in! Some gospel ministers are timid the changes large numbers of converts will bring. Just a few, not too many! But bold faith loves a big catch and God will strengthen you to cope.

As we near the end of the age the dragnet is being pulled in. I like to think that the internet is part of the dragnet – bringing in folk from all nations to the gospel (see <http://www.cybermissions.org>). Let Jesus minister to you, and have fellowship with you, and restore you and send you out to be fishers of men and women.

Day 59 - John 21:15-19

JESUS RESTORES SIMON PETER

John 21:15-19 ISV When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs." (16) Then he said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus told him, "Take care of my sheep." (17) He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was deeply hurt that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" So he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!" Jesus told him, "Feed my sheep. (18) "Truly, truly I tell you, when you were young, you would fasten your belt and go wherever you liked. But when you get old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten your belt and take you where you don't want to go." (19) Now he said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Keep following me."

There is a touch of the "Zen Master" about Jesus in this passage, walking along the shore with Peter and asking insightful questions that provoke Peter to be hurt and exasperated. It is clearly an Eastern "Master-Disciple" relationship. What is Jesus questioning? Peter's loyalty – the very thing that broke down on Good Friday when the cock crowed. And just as Peter denied Christ three times, here he has to reaffirm his love for Jesus three times. And as once Peter claimed that he would die for Christ, so he is told that that would be his fate in the end. In fact history has Peter executed alongside his wife - by being crucified upside down and exhorting her to remember the sufferings of the Lord and dying full of courage and of the hope of heaven.

Jesus had to probe deep into Simon Peter and deal with the matter that had separated their full communion. It had to be discussed and could not just be put to one side. So Jesus waits until after breakfast and takes Peter aside privately. I suppose that during the meal Peter was getting used to the idea that "the chat was coming". The meal gave time for Peter to prepare himself. Jesus gets right to the point "Simon son of Jonas (the translation son of John is probably incorrect, it is better rendered Jonas or Jonah) do you love (agapas) me? "

Peter replies with the more affectionate (but less grand) "Lord you know that I love (philo) you." commentators have made much difference between agape (charity, disinterested love) and phileo (friendship, loyalty, companionship, affectionate love). Three times Peter declares his loyalty with phileo and refuses to use the colder and more formal term of agape. Phileo is love for a limited inner circle of compatriots, while agape is the common human generosity of the saint. Peter wanted to be Jesus' real friend not just a distant worshiper.

Restoration is often a necessary part of dealing with saints who stray. Jesus gives us a useful pattern to follow:

1. Have a talk in private, after having had a meal together.
2. Raise the topic directly and plainly.
3. Do not rehash the incident or vent your own hurt. Just deal with the remaining issue/s that need to be worked through.
4. Aim at restoration not condemnation.

5. Do not do a superficial "brushing over" of the incident - keep going until you strike the core of the person.
6. Follow restoration with an expression of trust e.g. "feed my sheep".

The commissioning of Peter was put in three slightly different ways – feed my lambs, shepherd/care for my sheep, and feed my sheep. A few things can be noted here:

1. The sheep are "My sheep" – they belong to Jesus.
2. The sheep are entrusted to Peter – caring for God's people is a profound responsibility for which we will have to give an account.
3. The young disciples especially (the lambs) need feeding from the Word (v.15) as does, the whole flock (v.17).
4. The older disciples the "sheep" need care and leadership.

It is my personal opinion that the ministry of the Word is often neglected while the emphasis is placed on management theories or programs or songfests and entertainment.

We are called to feed the sheep, not to have them running in circles!

Feeding the sheep means giving them the right spiritual food – Scripture rightly expounded with Christ at the center of it all. I am astonished at the general lack of preaching on the person and work of Jesus Christ – for that is where the rich food is.

Does ministry lead us to glory and profit or to the cross? For Peter it was to the cross i.e. to shameful public execution. Ministry is a glorious calling but a rotten career path. If you expect a good wage and a nice car and professional esteem and a genteel retirement, then do not choose the ministry – least of all a missionary or apostolic calling.

"Now he said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God." The idea of martyrdom has fallen a long way out of favor in evangelical circles. But our death can glorify God if our faith is strong. Physical suffering and death is not terrifying if you are sure of Heaven and of eternal life. No sane person wants to be a martyr, not even Peter and Jesus knew that when He said "and take you where you don't want to go". But suffering and martyrdom can be part of God's plan for us and if they are we need to accept them as such and use them to glorify God.

"After saying this, he told him, "Keep following me." – the basic instruction for us all – keep following Jesus. Don't follow the world. Follow the Lord. We will look at this in greater depth tomorrow.

Day 60 - John 21:19-25

FOLLOW ME

John 21:19-25 MKJV He spoke this signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, Follow Me. (20) Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following (the one who also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, who is he who betrays You?) (21) Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, Lord, and what of this one? (22) Jesus said to him, If I desire that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me. (23) Then this saying went abroad among the brothers, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him, He shall not die, but, If I desire that he remain until I come, what is that to you? (24) This is the disciple who testifies of these things and wrote these things. And we know that his testimony is true. (25) And there are also many things, whatever Jesus did, which, if they should be written singly, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

Jesus has an individual plan for each of our lives, and we are not to compare ourselves with others. Peter and John were different personalities with very different temperaments and very different destinies.

Peter was the leader, who got all the rebukes, seemed to make all the mistakes and was going to be a martyr. John, was the favorite, John got to lean on Jesus' breast and received far fewer tough rebukes. So Peter turns and sees young John tagging along (John was probably the youngest apostle) and says "What of this one?" If Peter was going to have to suffer martyrdom then he wanted the goody-two-shoes favorite to go down the same track.

Comparisons and feelings on unfairness are rife in Christian (and non-Christian) circles. It is sure tempting to gripe and growl about others in ministry who seem to be "less spiritual" but are far "more successful". Always our gripes appear to be legitimate. Mine is "Why do all these prosperity-gospel guys who write rubbish get their books published while my bible-teaching ebooks never see print!" I am sure that you have a favorite rumble as well. But Jesus is not impressed by my grumbling or by my appeals to "fairness". God's justice is far more subtle and complex than our human concepts of fairness.

"Jesus said to him, If I desire that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." Boy that is a tough line! Jesus is saying: "John's destiny is none of your business and if I want John to be around when I return, then so be it. You, Peter have just one job and that is following me."

Competition swimmers are told to just swim their "personal best" and not to worry about the swimmer in the next lane. This applies to Christians too. We are not to worry about the church down the road, or the other missionary societies - rather we are to do our own work well and leave the rest to God.

This is truly hard when we see magnetic personalities with superficial ministries reaping all the donations while more substantial ministries are flat out paying the rent. There are times when God seems to have lost control of His Church and all the wrong folk are getting the big rewards. Paul must have felt the same when the false "mega-apostles" took all the

donations from Corinth while he worked with his hands and endured hostility. (*2 Corinthians chapters 8-12*).

But such negative musings just lead to bitterness, discouragement and failure. Nothing great has ever been accomplished by discouragement. No ministry has ever gone far by complaining about "fairness"; and anxiety over God's dealings has never made one hair white or black or added a foot to anyone's stature.

"You follow Me." That was Jesus plain, straightforward and twice repeated statement to Peter. Just fulfill your ministry with all faithfulness and diligence, following Jesus all the way. The other folks are God's business. "And there are also many things, whatever Jesus did, which, if they should be written singly, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen." Thus John winds up his gospel with a note that it is at best an accurate but partial account.

The Scriptures are inspired, accurate and true. However they are not a total picture of reality or even a total picture of God. The Scriptures are open to interaction with science and history and archaeology and all the truth that is in God's world – as no other holy book is.

Only God is the whole story. The Scriptures introduce us to a personal relationship with Jesus and also help shape our conscience and renew our minds into the knowledge of God. But the Scriptures do not replace God, and they cannot substitute for a personal intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The Pharisees knew the Scriptures (John 5: 39-40) but missed God and ended up being called 'sons of hell'. (Matthew 23:15).

If I want to learn about God as Creator, yes I look in the Genesis and Job, but I also look at his work in majestic sunsets, stars, plants and animals. If I want to know about Christ as Redeemer of course I read Romans, but I also look at how He redeems the saints I know and their testimonies in Church history. If I want to now about God as the Sanctifier and Perfecter of all things, then I read Hebrews, but I also look at how God perfects His people and His works.

John does claim that the Scriptures including his gospel are a reliable eyewitness account: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things and wrote these things. And we know that his testimony is true." John's final statement opens the door to the validity of the other gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and tells us that Jesus is more than can ever be written about or understood by us.