

THE GOSPEL OF **LIFE**



**AN APPLIED COMMENTARY
ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

(and on the Three Epistles)

Timothy Cow

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

An applied commentary
on the Gospel of John
(and on the Three Epistles)

by

Rev Dr Timothy Tow



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FOREWORD

RPG—READ, PRAY, GROW! Every child of God ought to grow. But then you must feed! Unless you feed regularly on the milk of the Word, you will not grow as you should.

Spiritual appetite does not come naturally, but only by hard discipline and patient cultivation. Many Christians fail because they have no method. Good intentions are not enough. System and method cultivate discipline and appetite.

RPG notes make Daily Bible Reading methodical and systematic. Fifteen to thirty minutes a day will set the reader on the road to healthier and more vibrant spiritual growth. Dr Timothy Tow writes with over thirty years' experience as pastor, teacher and theologian. Like the good cook of a Chinese ten-course dinner, he serves us with wholesome delicacies, with many appetizing spiritual flavours. May you savour the goodness of these pages.

These notes go out with the prayer that God's Holy Spirit will nurture and strengthen your Christian life as you feed!

Rev Dr Tow Siang Hwa

PREFACE

This Applied Commentary on John's Gospel and Epistles is the fruit of five months' labour of love writing up Everybody's RPG (Read, Pray, Grow) Daily Bible Reading Workbooks Nos. 8 – 13.

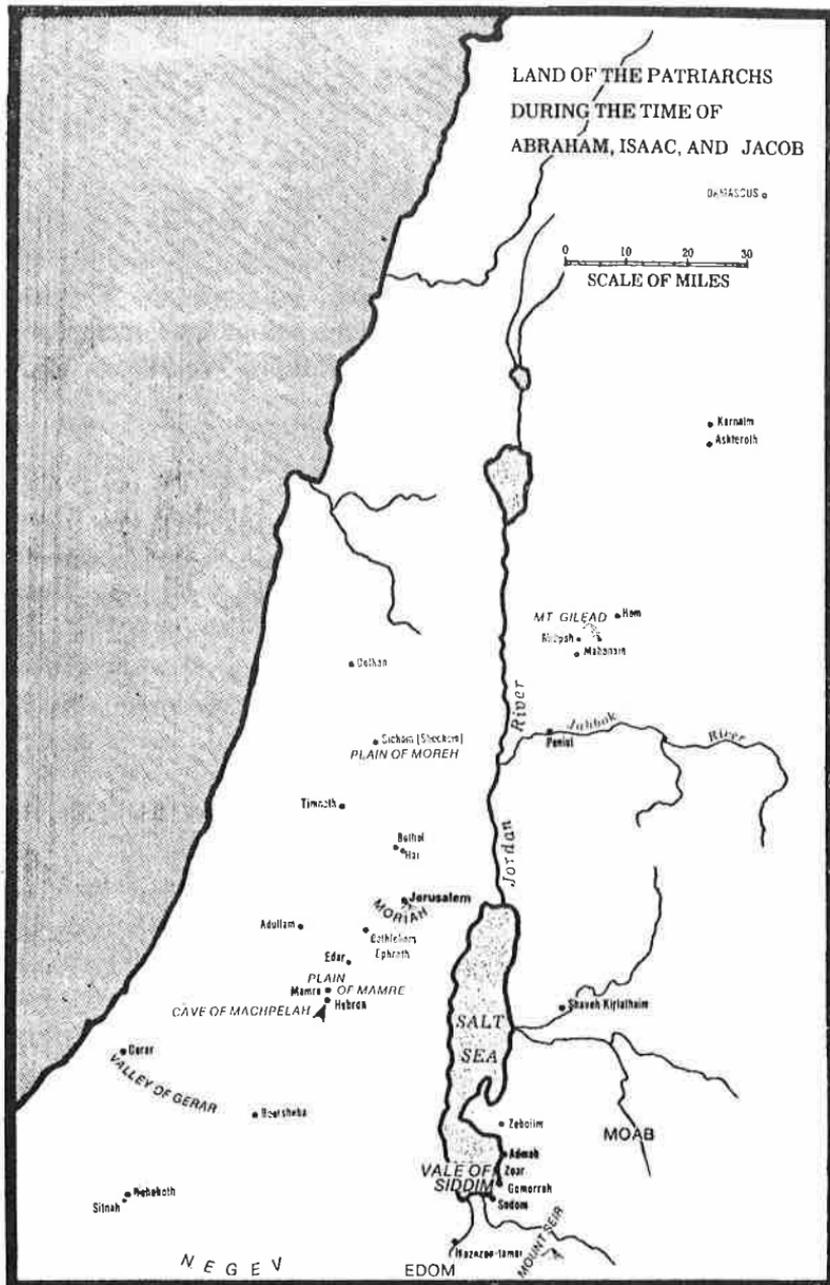
The primary purpose of these work-books is to whet Christians to read their Bibles daily. By explaining the Word chapter by chapter, section by section, particularly verses hard to understand and applying them to our daily life, these notes have become a spiritual meal many have come to relish.

An inherent reason why they are being treasured is their part in opening up what Bishop J.C. Ryle has observed to be the most precious book of the whole Bible. For herein and in the Epistles we are brought by the beloved disciple into an intimate fellowship with the Master no other apostle or prophet has done. And this intimate fellowship is possible only after you have first imbibed of the Word of Life, and received life everlasting by believing. Do you believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God?

This is the Book of Life offered to a dying mankind. If with your cooperation by recommending this book to some lost soul so that the same will find life everlasting therein, the putting together of the RPG notes into one volume will not have been made in vain. Amen.

— T.T.

LAND OF THE PATRIARCHS
DURING THE TIME OF
ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB



INTRODUCTION TO JOHN THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

In writing this fourth and last Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, the Apostle John states his purpose: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name" (Jn 20:31). John's Gospel is the Gospel of Life, that is what you and I, sons of death, need!

For a panoramic view of the Book, let us bring the 21 long chapters into briefest focus as follows:—

PICTURES OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

1. To seekers of the eternal Logos,
Jesus Christ is the Word of Life.
2. To the joined in holy matrimony,
Jesus Christ is the Wine of Life.
3. To him not born a second time,
Jesus Christ is the Breath of Life.
4. To her unquenched by five-fold philandering,
Jesus Christ is the Water of Life.
5. To the invalid, sick and abandoned,
Jesus Christ is the Physician of Life.
6. To hungry multitudes of the world,
Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life.
7. To those who imbibe of His Spirit,
Jesus Christ flows as Rivers of Life.
8. To men and women in dark pleasures,
Jesus Christ shines the Light of Life.
9. To the blind of body and spirit,
Jesus Christ is the Sight of Life.
10. To His own sheep who hear His word,
Jesus Christ is the Door of Life.

11. To both dead and living believing,
Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life.
12. By His death that many might live,
Jesus Christ is the Seed of Life.
13. To the disciples already cleansed,
Jesus Christ remains their Ablution of Life.
14. To Thomas and you who grope for Salvation,
Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
15. To infuse us for more fruitful service,
Jesus Christ is the Vine of Life.
16. By procession of the Holy Spirit,
The apostles are led to the Truth of Life.
17. To the Father's own elect ones,
Jesus Christ effectuates the Mediator of Life.
18. To desperate disciples who defend Him,
Jesus Christ remains their Shield of Life.
19. Before Caesar's governor who tries Him,
Jesus Christ royally stands the King of Life.
20. To worshippers of the Risen Lord,
Jesus Christ is the Peace of Life.
21. To His Flock and undershepherds,
Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Amen.

Chapter I

“To seekers of the eternal Logos Jesus Christ is the Word of Life”

Throughout the ages, philosophers both West and East have tried to fathom the secrets of the universe. The ultimate of their searchings must end in some supernatural power or being.

During the period in which the Fourth Gospel was written, the term “Word” in philosophical language had passed through a considerable history. Philo, the great representative of Alexandrian Judaism, thought that the term ‘Logos’ which in the Greek meant ‘Word’ or ‘Reason’ referred to a sort of function or manifestation of God by which the world was formed. (Machen).

In the Far East, there had arisen from China in the 6th Century B.C. Laotse with his book Tao-teh-ching, from which has come the philosophy called Taoism.

“Tao is the one universal principle in which all things have their origin and which is in all things as the very essence of being, is that to which one thinks back in the search of the obscure source out of which all proceeded at the beginning. This ultimate essence, having spontaneity, is also the impulse working in the world unobtrusively. From it as matter emanated the whole universe of things and through its working force each individual existence comes into being and is perfected.” (Columbia Encyclopedia).

To meet with the minds of the Chinese, the Translators of the Chinese Bible rightly chose the word 道 (Tao) which means “way”, “truth”, “doctrine” to translate the Greek word “logos”, rendered “word” in King James.

From this brief survey, we see that whatever concept of that ultimate power or being East or West has attained, it falls far short of what John declares to be the Logos, the Word of God.

Insofar as the Apostle John is concerned, “The Word of God” is a common phrase referring to the Divine Message which came either through the Scriptures or through the lips of a prophet or apostle. But God has not only spoken in written or oral language. He has also spoken through a Person — Jesus Christ. Here is the written and spoken Word, and here is also the incarnate Word, the mouthpiece of God.

It is John who can tell us that the Word of God is a Person, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Creator of the world, the Revealer of God the Father. “No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

The Eternity and Deity of the Word of Life.

“In the beginning” (v. 1) refers to the remotest eternal past, a beginning past the beginning of Gen. 1:1 when the universe was created. A beginning that cannot be reckoned by puny man, encapsuled in a world of space and time. Eternity is a characteristic of God’s immeasurable longevity — untouched by time. Christ the Word was with God. Christ the Word was God! Here is a mystery of His eternity, and a mystery of His Deity. V. 3 tells us that the Word was co-Creator of the universe with the Father. The Word of God also participated in the creation (for He commanded and they were created Ps. 148:5) as did the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2).

The Word, however, is not only Creator, but also Fountain of Life. What Paul ascribes to God that in Him we have our being and move and live (Acts 17:28), John declares to be accomplished by the blessing of the Word. (Calvin).

The life given by the Word was the light of men, the light given to us that surpasses what is given to other animate creatures — the light of reason. This light should be as a mirror in which we may see the divine power of the Word.

But the darkness of sin, like a thick fog, has blurred that light. Only some sparks of that original brightness shine in the murkiness of the human mind. The end result is that the darkness of our mind renders the few sparks left in us ineffectual. We do not comprehend, or understand the light, as it is said, “seeing they did not see” (Isa. 6:9). The Chinese translation of “comprehend” is “receive”.

The Herald of the Word.

The man sent by God, the herald of the Word of God, was John. This John is not John the apostle, the author of the Fourth Gospel, but John the Baptist. Can you find the many other references to John the Baptist? (The best help to study the Bible is a Concordance. Turn to the word "Baptist" or "John" or "Baptise". There you will have all references to John the Baptist listed! Like a computer!).

So great was the power of John's preaching that some thought he was the Messiah (Luke 3:15). Perhaps there were some converts of John who, at the time of the writing of John's Gospel, were still looking to the Baptist. (Apollos is an example. Acts 18:25. Read also Acts 19:1-4) This would be contrary to the humble spirit of every herald or witness to Christ. Every church member should look beyond his pastor to the Saviour. Every preacher should preach not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord (II Cor 4:5).

There was a modern John the Baptist, John Sung of China. He came to Singapore and SE Asia in the thirties. He was a preacher against sin like John the Baptist. The results of his Revival Meetings are far-reaching like the Baptist's. So much so that some John Sung followers look to him and not to Christ. Is this right?

The Word of Life is the True Light

If John the Baptist, the greatest prophet of God there ever was (Matt 11:11) was not the Light, but only a witness to the Light, how much lesser are the lights supposedly offered by those outside Christ. How misleading are the teachings of modernist and ecumenical theologians that there is light of salvation in other religions. How blind is the Pope who leads men not to Christ but to Mary and to himself!

Jesus is called the **true** Light, because He stands unique, alone, the one and only Light of salvation. Therefore, the Gospel is unique, the Bible is unique, the Christian Church, the body of Christ, is unique—because the Gospel is the good news of Christ's work of redemption, the Bible is His written Word, the Christian Church is founded on the Rock, Christ.

But though this true Light shone in the world, even before Christ was manifested in the flesh, the world persisted in voluntary blindness. Calvin says, "For we know that men have this unique quality above the other animals, that they are endowed with reason and intelligence and that they bear the distinction between right and wrong engraven in their conscience. Thus there is no man to whom some awareness of the eternal Light does not penetrate."

And though Christ came especially to the Jews, for He was born a Jew of the royal line of David, He became the more rejected by His kinsmen.

God is therefore no respecter of persons. Whoever would receive Him as Saviour, by believing in His Name, is saved. If you can say in your heart that Jesus is your Saviour and Lord, then you are born again. You are become a child of God with all the authority and privilege of sonship. You are indeed born anew by the power of God. It is a supernatural act of God wrought in you when you receive Christ as your Saviour. The True Light has effectively shone into our heart, while others, unbelieving Gentiles and Jews, are resisting Him. Have you received the True Light or are you shut against Him?

The Word of God Became a Man

The Word of God came to man in the form of messages spoken by the prophets. After this the spoken messages of the prophets were written down and became books of the Old Testament. Now, the Word of God came personally by becoming Man. That is what is meant by the Word was made flesh, or the Word became **incarnate** (a Latin word meaning **in the flesh**).

God is not satisfied that the prophets should speak His Word, as a King is not satisfied that his ministers represent him. God wants His own Son to come into the world to speak to us, as a King sends his crown prince to represent him to his people.

In this way God is more fully and gloriously revealed when we see Him, and hear Him, the Declarer of His Word. (Jn 1:18) Prophets were holy men, but Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God! While prophets spoke the truth, they might lack grace. (Compare John the Baptist's ministry with Christ's. Jesus Christ is Truth and Grace personified!)

John is the last prophet that stands at the dividing line between the Old and the New Testaments. He both closes the O.T. chapter and opens up the New.

Now, John the Apostle chimes in at v. 16 to add his testimony. The Apostle is overwhelmed by the graciousness upon graciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is overwhelmed by the new law of Grace not fully experienced by those under the law of Moses. How is John thus overwhelmed? By the Son of God who came, and by his personal contact with Him. This fact is further attested in I John 1:1, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have handled, of the Word of Life"

Hebrews 1:1 seems to sum up the words of this paragraph, "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

The Herald of the Word in Word and Action

John the Baptist was a true prophet because he preached not himself, but Christ. Read this long passage how he exalts Christ, how he points you and me to Christ for salvation.

John the Baptist was a true prophet because he did not impersonate Elias (Greek spelling for Elijah) who is the prophet to herald Christ in His Second Coming. Nor did John impersonate Christ for he denied he was **That Prophet** (v. 21) **That Prophet** was Christ whom Moses predicted in Deut. 18:15 and is further identified by Peter at Pentecost to refer to Christ (Acts 3:22).

If John the Baptist is a true prophet then what he says is true. What he testifies of the Christ is true.

What are the signs of the true Christ? That He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The Lamb which is sacrificed from the dawn of history is the only means of reconciliation between God and fallen man (Gen 4:4).

Christ is the True One because on Him descended from Heaven the Spirit like a dove. This happened on Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan, which is recorded in greater detail in Matt. 3:16. Here B.B. Warfield observes the Triune God to be in full manifestation: "God in Heaven (speaking), God on earth (standing) and God descending from heaven to earth."

Yes, John could not miss the testimony of God to him that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. What do you say to John's testimony?

As to Jesus' baptism, it is unique, quite different from ours. Ours is in witness of repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Jesus' baptism is one rather of commissioning like the washing of the Priest in the O.T. (Ex. 29:4) before He enters into His public ministry (Scofield).

To fulfil all righteousness: "To offer His Father full obedience, while the particular reason was to consecrate baptism in His own body, that it might be common between Him and us" (Calvin).

Finders of the Word of Life

Thousands heard John the Baptist preaching on the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. But how many were real seekers after the Word? How many found the Messiah, the Saviour?

Only two on the second day of the great crowds. Andrew and most certainly John the author of the Gospel (Machen). Andrew was a good recruiter of men. He brought Simon his brother who was to become chief of the apostles. Simon the simple fisherman was to become Peter or Cephas (in Aramaic) a rock. You may not be a great preacher, but you can win those who might and nurture those who would. Have you heard of Operation Andrew? Bring an unsaved friend to Church! Give him a Gospel tract!

Next in line to be called by Jesus, directly, is Philip. Philip in turn found Nathaniel (also named Bartholomew). Each apostle has a particular nature, as has been noticed, but each one complements the other. As for Nathaniel, he had a childlike faith to believe in Jesus to be the Son of God, the King of Israel. This is most commendable: simple, childlike faith! His faith would be further strengthened when he saw more of Jesus' mighty deeds. Yes, the disciples were thus trained to be mighty apostles by listening more to Jesus' sermons and seeing more of His miracles, until the day that the Son of God was crucified for their sins and arose again from the dead.

Reader, do you believe as Nathaniel believed? Do you lead your loved ones to Christ as Andrew did? Do you write to friends of your newfound Saviour as John the apostle has written for you and me? Do you seek to know more of the Saviour by reading more of His words and deeds? Let every finder of the Word of Life share his treasure with others.

Chapter II

To those joined in holy matrimony Jesus Christ is the Wine of Life

This chapter is composed in fact of two parts. The first part is Christ's first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee, turning water into wine, which gives us the title above. The second part tells of His first cleansing of the Temple by overturning the tables of the money changers, and driving them who sold animals and birds out of the Father's House. For brevity we could only mention Jesus Christ as the Wine of Life, but let us not forget Part II.

For an overall survey of this chapter, perhaps it is more expedient to begin with the latter portion. Here we see Jesus exceeding the denunciatory spirit of the Baptist. John the Baptist has been seen to be a revivalist who is not afraid to denounce the Jews for their sins, their hypocrisies and their malpractices. Is Jesus the lesser one in attacking sin? No, we see Jesus even more courageous! He gives no face to anyone who persists in stubborn unrepentance. His zeal for the Father's House causes Him to discharge a full volley of righteous indignation on all the crooked dealers in the Temple court. He makes a scourge of cords which he swings vigorously to drive out all who make merchandise of God's House. He defends His stern action against the self-righteous Jews who dispute His authority. Christ is a Revivalist who spiritually grinds to powder all who resist the righteous judgement of God.

While this portion of Ch. II portrays our Lord in all the severity of a prosecutor and a judge (and that is all we see in John the Baptist), in the first portion of the chapter we behold Jesus in all His perfect humanity. Where He can make allowance, where he can oblige, He does not hesitate to do. In the miracle of the water turned into wine, let us not forget that He does it also to please His mother Mary. He keeps the Fifth Commandment. Let us not forget that He does it to relieve the embarrassed host. He loves His neighbour as Himself. Let us not forget that He takes time off to attend a wedding, a long drawn affair in those days, longer than attending a Chinese wedding dinner today. This He did with fulness of participation in order to bless the sanctity of holy matrimony, to give more grace to the grace of life (I Pet 3:7). While we see His Deity first manifested at Cana, let us not forget the fulness of His humanity. Jesus the Man.

Do you have need in your life? Does it concern your life partner, your wedded life, your children, your finances, your day-to-day problems? Jesus cares. Jesus is ever ready to help. Why don't you ask Him about it? Pray!

The Wine of Life comes to Cana

Do you know your Bible geography? Buy a big Bible, with maps at the end-pages.

Look up Cana on the map titled: "Palestine in the time of Christ." You will see Cana situated on the road that runs down south from Capernaum on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee, passing through Magdala. This road, after leading you to Cana, runs south to Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. We conclude our Lord knows Cana as much as Nazareth, since they are so close to each other.

Our Lord must have had many friends and relatives in both of these towns. So His disciples, for they, except Judas Iscariot, were all Galileans.

The Bible says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." (Rom. 12:15). While we have many occasions of sorrow wherein Jesus is present, we cannot have a complete picture of Him without this record of His attendance at a wedding! And wherever Jesus appears, He brings blessing.

I'm sure the coming of Jesus to this wedding attracts an exceptional crowd. For all the people, having heard what John the Baptist has said of Him, would want to see more of Him, inasmuch as they wanted to see the bridal couple. No wonder the wine ran out. What an embarrassment to the host, but paradoxically, what an honour! Often we have observed at wedding dinners the empty seats unfilled by those who fail to turn up. Let Christ come into any situation of your life, for then you will find good support from His children.

When we invite Christ to the pulpit by exalting His Name, we attract many to the Church Service. When we invite Christ to our business by trading honestly and fairly, we bring many customers. When we honour Christ with our substance, He blesses us with abundance. The question is, do you invite Christ? Is Christ your honoured guest not only on your Wedding Day but also at every meal and in every conversation?

**“The Blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich,
And he addeth no sorrow with it.”**

— Prov. 10:22

How much wine did Jesus make? From the context of what Mary said to the servants and the setting of the six stone waterpots, it must be concluded this number was requested by our Lord. These were huge stone jars used by the Jews for purification purposes such as the washing of hands before eating. At “two or three firkins a piece”, and since one firkin according to Scofield=9 gallons and 1 gallon=4.5 litres, we have each water pot holding an average of 100 litres. Times 6 and you get 600 litres! How much would that cost today?

Our Lord is the Creator of heaven and earth. In that light this amount is but a drop in the ocean. If Jesus had no problem multiplying five loaves and two fishes to feed 5,000 men (excluding women and children), He needed no exertion to produce 600 litres to satisfy, perhaps, 6,000 enthusiastic guests. Remember He was a greater than John the Baptist. He was the new rising Star. Don't smother your imagination of the magnitude of the crowds. He satisfied all their needs, with plenty to spare, as in the feeding of the 5,000.

John 2:9-11

The Wine of Life not the Whisky of Death

Because of the wine that was made by our Lord in Cana of Galilee, certain Christians have taken to drinking, and to the serving of strong alcoholic drinks at their wedding dinners with loud “yam sengs”. This is a misunderstanding and misapplication of the truth.

The wine that Jesus made, according to Hastings Bible Dictionary, like the Hebrew wines, was light. This is concurred by Dr. R.L. Harris in an article in Bible Today in which he points out the vast difference in alcoholic content between such wine and the whiskies and brandies of today. Dr. Buswell humorously observed that these modern “yam seng” type of “wines”, like gasohol, can be used to run a motor car. But he added, “Our stomachs are not combustion engines.”

Moreover, the Palestinian wine used in the meals of the Hebrews was in diluted form. The wine of Sharon was mixed with two parts of water, being lighter than others. With the other wines, the proportion was one part wine and three parts water.

The danger of wine to make a person drunk is warned by none other than King Solomon (Read Proverbs 23:29-35). Therefore, it is best for Christians to keep away from intoxicating drinks. Be teetotalers!

St. Pual says: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” (Rom. 15:17-21).

From Cana to Capernaum

This matter-of-fact record of Jesus and his disciples and relatives going to Capernaum, a fishing village on the N.E. coast of the Sea of Galilee, veils a significant step in our Lord's life. Perhaps all in His party went in order to escort the bride and bridegroom to their home there. The greater reason, insofar as our Lord was concerned, was to establish His headquarters there for His initial Galilean ministry. This is stated in full detail in Matt. 4:12-17: "And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtalim The people that sat in darkness saw great light"

There is another reason why Jesus came to Capernaum away from his native Nazareth. As the saying goes, "Familiarity breeds contempt," our Lord saw the futility of working with His own townspeople. "No prophet is accepted in his own country," he said in answer to those who taunted Him. To answer them in Cantonese: "Local ginger is not hot."

Not Nazareth but Capernaum received the Lord gladly. Capernaum, in the beginning, that is. Later on, when He became too familiar to the Capernaum people, so that they took Him for granted, He denounced them too. Read Matt. 11:23-24.

In the steps of the Master, can you find on the map Nazareth, Cana and Capernaum? What is the distance from one town to another?

From Capernaum to Jerusalem

He remained in Capernaum but a few days, since the Feast of the Passover was drawing near. As it was the duty of every Jew to present himself at every Passover, (Ex 23:14-17), Jesus went dutifully, as when he first went at the age of twelve, to Jerusalem. It is our duty to attend Church, in the steps of the Master!

One thing that had bothered Him all those years were they who sold sacrificial animals and birds on the Temple site. Not so much the physical as the moral realm was invaded by these vendors. Calvin comments: "The priests misused the merchandise for their own gain and avarice, and such a mockery of God was unendurable. Again whatever excuse men may plead, so soon as they depart, however slightly, from God's command they are blameworthy and need correcting." In the Second Cleansing of the Temple after the Triumphal Entry Jesus denounced those who sold in the Temple to "have made it a den of thieves." (Matt 21:13).

Why did Christ not teach these erring ones, but resorted to force? Calvin comments: "Since the time had come for Him to discharge in public the office committed to Him by the Father, He wanted in some way to enter into possession of the Temple and set forth evidence of His divine authority. And that all might pay heed to His teaching, their sluggish and drowsy minds had to be aroused by something new and strange. He was to show Himself as the Lord of the Temple. What He did at that time was a sort of prelude to the Reformation the Father had set Him to accomplish." Jesus acted as we can see from a most sincere motive, in "righteous indignation" against those who had no heart for God, but were bent on making money even at the expense of God.

What a solemn warning to us who are in management of Church property, to us who use Church property. Do we bring glory to God or shame to His Name, who use God's House?

The Disciples, the Jews and the Miracle-Believers

John 2:17-25

At this initial presentation of the Messiah to the Jewish people, we can see three types of audience. Let us take them in reverse order.

The Miracle-believers. These are many, the bulk of the crowd, easily moved by outward signs. These may be represented by the shallow, stony ground into which the good seed had fallen, which brought forth only temporary results. (Read the Parable of the Sower in Matt. 13:1-9). Though these who made up the crowds "believed in His Name when they saw the miracles which He did," Jesus did not believe them. "He knew all men." (v. 24). Our Lord has all-divine discernment of every situation in life. To say that we believe is not enough. To what extent is our belief? Let us believe not only on our lips and in our heads, but in our hearts, yea, deep down into our inner most beings (our stomachs! if you read John 6).

The Jews. These are diehards who cling to the Jewish religion, refusing to accept anything beyond Moses. However, Jesus came not to do away Moses, but to fulfil. To make things difficult for our Lord, they ask for a sign. This is a mistake, for Christ does not give His credentials by working miracles at the behest of His inquirers.

But since they ask, He points to the one great final miracle that is Himself in His death and resurrection. This is the basis of the New Testament, of the Christian faith upon which the Jews must build in order to be saved. Since these who challenge our Lord do not deserve an answer, our Lord gives it to them cryptically, as He does in parables. Only he that hath an ear will hear. If you are a Jewish Reader, we have no better proof of Christ Jesus being the Messiah than His death and resurrection. What do you say to that?

The Disciples. These are they who truly believe unto salvation, who read their Old Testament with perception. "They followed the guidance of Scripture to understand Christ aright" And they knew their Scripture so well that they could recollect what it had predicted about the Messiah to come. Take note of the Verb "remembered" in v. 17 and v. 22. "and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." Calvin concludes: "And indeed none will ever learn what Christ is, or the purpose of His actions and sufferings, save by the guiding and teaching of Scripture." Doesn't this high statement on the Scripture justify the effort to produce this RPG Workbook?

Chapter III

To Him Not Born a Second Time Jesus Christ is the Breath of Life

John 3:16, perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible, is found in this chapter. If the Gospel of John is called the Gospel of Life, this verse might be called the Verse of Life.

How do we know that a person is alive? When he has breath in his nostrils. How did man become a living soul? When God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). This life that God had imparted to man not only refers to his physical life, but more important to his spiritual life. This raises man far above the apes, for apes and other animals were merely created out of the earth; but man, alone, is made of "the dust of the ground" plus the breath or life God specially breathed into him. Thus he is said to be made in the image of God.

But the spiritual life man had received from God was lost when man disobeyed Him, "for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Hence, for a person to live the life God had given him, above the level of animals, he must be restored. A man who has drowned can be restored by artificial respiration. A man who is dead in trespasses and sins can be resuscitated only by the Breath of Life which the Son of God gives. This is what all the talk of being born again actually is, not as it is loosely used by the world since President Carter.

The process of breathing anew into a spiritually dead man is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must work in a man's heart to convict him of his sins, of his need of repentance from his sins, and to cause him to look to the crucified Saviour for salvation.

This theology of salvation is discussed by our Lord with Nicodemus, a well-educated "ruler" of the Jews. He belonged to the Jewish Sanhedrin, he was an elder of the Church, but he had the shell of religion, not its kernel or life. Thus he needs to be born again. All the "churchianity" you might inherit from Christian parents to the third or fourth generation will never get you to heaven, my Reader! Salvation is an individual thing. The question is, are you born again? Do you have the Breath of Life in you? St. Paul says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9).

The Breath of Life Opens our Eyes and Quickens our Feet

V. 3 says: "Except a man be born again, he can not see the Kingdom of God." Unless you are born again you are a blind person. All the mysteries of God, of heaven, of the life everlasting and the joy of the Christian life are meaningless to you. I Cor. 2:14 says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." You may come to Church and hear many sermons, but you will not understand what the Bible says and not appreciate what the preacher expounds from it. The spiritual things spoken are unintelligible to you. **You cannot see** the colours of the rainbow of heavenly truths if you are not born again. No wonder you soon stop coming to church, for you say, the service and sermon are meaningless. May the Breath of Life, of the Lord Jesus Christ, open your eyes by His Holy Spirit.

V. 5 says, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is a most crucial subject: entrance into heaven! Not by good deeds, education, respectability, position in Church, is a man qualified for heaven, but by being born again by the Breath of Life, Jesus Christ.

The process of rebirth is totally dependent upon the working of God's Spirit. V. 8 tells us of the mystery of the Spirit's working upon an unsaved person's soul. As the wind blows at will, sometimes in full force, sometimes as a gentle breeze, so does God come upon us as He pleases. Some are converted in a traumatic experience, as Saul on the Damascus Road; some are converted like Timothy through pious upbringing under godly Grandma Lois and Mother Eunice. By the new birth, we suddenly spring to life, swift of feet to enter heaven.

The water mentioned here is not the water of baptismal regeneration as taught by Roman Catholics. The water here is plainly the water of the Holy Spirit, as the Greek word **kai** for **and** can be translated **even**. Yes, not physical water which is used in the sacrament or holy ceremony, but the spiritual, as it is stated in I Cor 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body" Your water baptism, without the inner baptism of the Spirit, will never qualify you for heaven!

The Breath of Life is given by Him who dies our death

In the previous lesson we discussed the work of the Holy Spirit in causing us to be born again, to become spiritually alive again. The Holy Spirit is the **agent** of our salvation.

In these three short verses are mentioned the work of the Son, the **ground** of our salvation. The Holy Spirit does not cause us to be born again, except by leading us to the cross. To the cross of His substituting death, in our place, paying the penalty of our sins, which is everlasting suffering in hell.

This teaching is stressed by none other than the Sufferer Himself. So Jesus refers Nicodemus to the brazen serpent God told Moses to make, to which when a man would look in faith should receive restoration of life. He would be cured of his snake bite, saved from certain death.

A man can never receive the Breath of Life unless he comes humbly like the thief before his dying Saviour, confessing his sins and pleading for mercy.

Hence, when Paul came to Corinth with the Gospel, he did not stress on tongues or mass faith healing, or "miracle rallies" or mass evangelism with all the human efforts thrown in. Paul says this to the Corinthians and to us today, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Here is the test of a preacher. If he merely preaches ethics, requiring you to do this or that, he can only further burden you. If he talks of the Spirit, but does not exalt Christ, the Spirit will not say amen in your heart. When Christ and His death and resurrection power is preached, it produces results!

In the cross, In the cross,
Be my glory ever.
All my sins are washed away
In the Blood of Jesus.

— John Sung

The Gospel is the Light of Life

V. 17 tells us of the offer of salvation by God in Christ His Son to a lost world. Christ came to save, not to condemn, like a good doctor whose job is to heal and not to scold. A good doctor does not blame a patient for getting sick, but neither can a patient be healed unless he entrusts himself completely to the doctor. If a patient should begin to question a doctor, what his qualifications are and how many years' experience he has had, no doctor will heal him. It is the believing part of mankind that will be saved, not the disbelieving and the disputing.

Why does the greater part of the world reject Christ in unbelief? Because of its darkness, its sinful pleasures and unrighteous gains. Darkness can never receive light. When light comes, darkness goes. Those who love darkness will therefore persist to live in darkness. They will not come to the light. Like some birds of prey, the owl and the night hawk. These are birds of darkness. For them to mix with the day birds is quite impossible. They hunt stealthily in the night.

But birds that are of the day receive the sun with joy, with blithe chirping as the dawn breaks. Are you a night bird or a day bird? If you love evil you will live in darkness. If you love truth you will come to the light. You will come to Jesus Christ the light. You will come to Church to worship Him with joy.

In what other parts of the Gospel does Jesus declare Himself to be Light?

Does the Water of Baptism Divide Men?

V. 25 says that it does! Here was a dispute on baptism as a rite of purification between John's disciples and the Jews. Calvin says these disciples were ignorant and reckless in discussing a subject beyond their understanding, and worse than not being able to assert the legitimate use of baptism was the sinful ambition whereby they set up their master's cause in opposition to Christ. If there were controversies on baptism in Jesus's day and Paul's day (I Cor 1:11-17) no wonder there are multiplied disputes in our day.

If it is a matter of form, Calvin says that even if it was by total immersion, "we must not worry over much about the outward rite so long as it accords with the spiritual truth and the Lord's institution and rule." In other words, the inward spiritual significance of baptism is more important than the outward form of administration.

In the Church, immersion, pouring, sprinkling and washing are the various modes practised. Which is the right mode does not bother us. We accept all, because the outward is a secondary matter. We adopt this attitude from Paul in his concluding argument in I Cor 1:11-17. In v. 17 he declares, "For Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the gospel"

To advance any denominational baptismal practice so that it hinders the progress of the Gospel is deplored. As in Corinth some declared they were followers of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas and some (using even the Name) of Christ. This sectarianism, we say again, is sinful.

“If Christ is to be First, we must be last”

The circumstances under which John the Baptist made this famous statement, “He must increase, but I must decrease,” which is re-stated above, are these: John’s disciples were naturally more attached to him than to Christ. For not looking to Christ the Lamb of God, they were admonished. Sectarianism is sinful.

John was only a prophet, a mouthpiece of God, whose ministry was to herald the coming of the Saviour. In so doing, he must preach the baptism of repentance, but inseparably linked to repentance is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John’s converts did repent of their sins and were baptised by John himself. But they stopped short at that. They clung to the Baptiser of Water but did not look to the Baptiser of Fire, Jesus Christ. John therefore had to clarify to his followers that he was not the Christ but His forerunner. He is not the Bridegroom but the bestman. The bestman stands in the shadow of the Bridegroom. Therefore his disciples were dissuaded from following him. He was fading out like the bestman having done his job, so that Christ his groom-friend might be seen in all the resplendence of His glory. Every true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ humbles himself at the Master’s feet that He might have the Pre-eminence.

John the Baptist sets every servant of God a good example. He does not care what men will say of him so long as Christ is exalted. Like the donkey that carries Christ into Jerusalem, he doesn’t care to look to the left or right so long as he can take his Master into Jerusalem.

The reason why God cannot bless certain Christian ministries is that they put themselves first and Christ last. What do you think of a donkey who tries to ride his Master? But listen to St Paul: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that is all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). “If Christ is to be first, we must be last!”

Chapter IV

To her unquenched by five-fold philandering Jesus Christ is the Water of Life

As in Ch. 2, this Chapter is composed of two parts—the account of the Woman of Samaria followed by the healing of the Nobleman's son. For brevity we have given Jesus as the Water of Life.

Where is Samaria? On the map you will find it midway between Nazareth in the north and Jerusalem in the south. Samaria became capital of the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom some decades after its separation from Judah in the south. It was founded by the dynasty of wicked king Ahab. In the days of our Lord, the name Samaria applied rather to the whole Province.

Who were the Samaritans? They were a mixed race from intermarriage between foreigners and the local people. The Samaritans practiced a mixed religion and as a result "They feared the Lord and served their own gods" (II Ki. 17:33). Hence Samaritans were despised by the Jews. In order to hurt our Lord, the Jews called Him a Samaritan (Jn. 4:48).

But our Lord was not prejudiced against the Samaritans. Rather, He exposed the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders by His parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37). He sets us the example by speaking kindly to the woman of Samaria. This so surprised the woman that she asked, "How is it that thou being a Jew, askest drink of me which am a woman of Samaria?"

That the woman of Samaria has had five husbands reflects the sinfulness of human nature. Surely hers is not a case of remarrying after the death of each former one. Now the word "philander", according to Chambers Dictionary, means "to make love", "to flirt".

As it is composed of two Greek words, **love** and **man**, we use it in the sense of aggressiveness from the normally weaker sex.

Notice that the Samaritan woman is well-versed in theology, but in her sinful state, her theoretical knowledge of God did not save her. She needed to be born again, be thoroughly converted from her immoral life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ's preaching wrought such repentance in her heart and Christ's Godliness so overwhelmed her that she must testify to the whole world of her new-found salvation.

A new born Christian is a bubbling Christian, so filled with joy of salvation that it overflows everywhere as our Lord later declares, "Out of the belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn. 7:38). If Jesus is the Water of life that flows into you, there must be an outflow. Do you have this inflow and outflow experience?

Christ is above all because He comes from above

This section seems to be the author's testimony to Christ in support of the Baptist's self-abnegation.

Why must Christ be exalted above all? Why must John the Baptist's followers turn to Christ, now that He is revealed? Because He is from above. He is sent by God. He is the Father's only begotten Son. He is the Beloved of the Father to Whom is given power over all things. He is the appointed Saviour in whom we must believe in order to be saved. Conversely, if we reject Him, we can only incur the anger of God forever!

Yes, Jesus is the Word of God, the mouthpiece of God. Prophets spoke what Jesus' Spirit told them to speak, but Jesus spoke by Himself. The apostles though endued with power had as much power as was given by Christ. Christ, being the Son, was given unlimited power. He had the fulness of the Spirit working with Him. This is another reason why He is above all.

Thus, we see the disciples standing quite embarrassed and helpless before their Lord when the father of the lunatic boy reported to the Master, "And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him" (Matt. 17:16). The Christ Who is above all saved the situation. It is to God's glory that those who seem to be successful in the ministry should become crest-fallen when they do not render due worship to their Lord.

Even John the Baptist who so exalted Christ in the heyday of his ministry should somewhat cast doubt on his Lord in the hour of temptation (Read Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:19-23). John wavered because he was only a man, and though declared the greatest prophet, to him was given the Spirit by measure. Even Moses the Lawgiver could not enter the Promised Land because he did not do exactly what God had told him to do in bringing out water from the rock. Christ is the only One sinless, peerless, immaculate, because He had the Spirit with Him in unlimited measure.

Should the failures of great servants of God discourage us? St Paul says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come" (I Cor. 10:11).

Finally, read what the Apostle to the Hebrews says in contrast between the Son of God and the servant Moses: "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

The Water That Quenches Every Sinful Thirst

There is an ancient well in the whereabouts of Sychar that remains to this day. A Greek Orthodox Church is built over it, so it becomes today a tourist attraction. It is a very deep well with a stone wall on top of it.

Now, it was the “sixth hour” when our Lord sat on the well, because he was “wearied with his journey.” While the disciples were gone to the city to buy food for the Master, there came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Using a language this woman could understand, Jesus offered her living water that keeps bubbling as from a well, so she need not be thirsty. What a lesson in homiletics, in the art of effective speaking!

While the woman was concerned then with physical needs, our Lord was leading her to her spiritual needs. Hence, the leading question on her husband that exposed her unquenchable sexual thirsts. All inordinate desires, excesses, abandonments to lust, are symptoms of sin. Only He who has the living Water, the Water of life, can quench the thirst that stems from sin!

Notice how gently Jesus deals with the woman — for He understands her helplessness. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). What a gentle Saviour. O how you and I, sinners saved by grace, should love Him. How the woman of Samaria loves Him too, because when she confesses her sins to Him, she finds forgiveness. There is no sin too great that Christ cannot forgive!

Which Mountain?

Inasmuch as the Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with one another because of their differences in race and religion, they had different places of worship.

For the Jews Moses had commanded that they shall worship at only the place God would choose for them (Dt. 12:15; 11). When they entered the Promised Land it was Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). Under David, and since then to Jesus' day, it was Jerusalem.

The Samaritans, however, could boast of many sacred hills where the Patriarchs had worshipped. Suffice it to mention only the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal where Joshua led the Israelites in a marathon worship. Most probably it was Mt Gerizim that the woman referred to as being the Samaritans' place of worship. Today, the Samaritans worship and sacrifice on this mountain.

The Jews rightly worshipped at Jerusalem the only appointed place since David, as noted above. With the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, they were ushered into New Testament times. No more was the restriction to only one place of worship (Dt. 12:15). For the Gospel was to be preached to all nations, worldwide. To worship at only one place would be impossible.

What is more important is the "spirit and truth" in worship. And the way of worship through Jesus Christ is open to all men. Which mountain? You have the answer!

No more the insistence on Jerusalem or Gerizim. Wherever you've found the Saviour that is the place you begin to worship the Father in His Name.

Mission and Vision

When the disciples returned with food they had bought for the Master, they were surprised by His word, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of". The work of God cannot be measured by secular, professional standards. It is a mission to be accomplished in a race against time. In being so immersed in His personal witnessing to the Samaritan woman our Lord had become oblivious to hunger. The joy of seeing her soul saved became His strength. That is the secret He is now imparting to His pupils. To serve God willingly is a blessing. To serve God unwillingly is a burden. Henceforth let your burden of service become a blessing!

Not only is our Lord imbued with a high sense of mission. He is also carried away by the horizon of His vision. He sees far beyond the disciples. The disciples see the grain in the field still as young shoots. The Master sees a harvest of souls for immediate reaping, viz. the unwanted Samaritans. Let us look way beyond our own field to the fields God would send us. Let us not be limited by our denominational interests, but cooperate with others in God's harvest field. And those who work get paid!

Everlasting life is a well-spring that flows on and on

In v. 14 our Lord says, "But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life". The everlasting life we receive from Christ not only quenches our spiritual thirst but also the thirst of others. This marvellous truth is restated in Jn. 7:38, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water". A saved person is alive forevermore not only for himself but for the saving of others. Salvation is multiplied from him as a well-spring and flowing rivers cannot be contained in themselves.

This truth is experienced by the Samaritan woman as by no other person, v. 30-42. A great revival broke out. A whole city was taken by storm, and drenched by a spiritual rain never seen before. Deep ditches of repentance as exemplified in the repentance from 5-fold philandering in the Samaritan woman were dug which now received the Water of the Spirit. No Gospel campaign can last beyond its own duration unless the sin question is dealt with. Hence the difference between John Sung's deep-digging ministry and today's inch-shallow superficiality. One flows on like a well-spring the other is dried up after a false start.

A Prophet Comes Home

“Familiarity breeds contempt” was quoted in our notes for Ch. 2. This English saying has a parallel in Jesus’ statement about a prophet not being accepted in his own country (Matt. 14:57, Mark 6:4, Lk 4:24). Jn. 4:44: “For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.” Therefore we can conclude that His homecoming was an anticlimax to his resounding ministry in Samaria. Oftentimes God’s servants find themselves in the same predicament. The pastor is taken for granted by his own congregation. But that is the lot of Christian service our Lord has borne, a cross we must also bear.

Nevertheless, our Lord’s homecoming to Galilee was not altogether cold shouldered as seen in Mark 6:4-6. There we see He could do no mighty work because of His relatives’ unbelief. In Jn 4:45 we see the exception to the maxim in their reception: “Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him”. Reason? There were those who went with Christ to the Passover in Jerusalem and they were impressed by His cleansing of the Temple and miracles (Jn. 2:13-25). “For We can do nothing against the truth but for the truth” (II Cor. 13:8). Do you still try to brush aside those whom God has effectively used?

**Second Miracle in Cana — The Water of Life
Quenches a Fever**

One good deed brings forth another. The miracle of water into wine at Cana made such an impression in the hearts of believers that it was talked about everywhere. The fame had spread to Capernaum, Peter's fishing village. Here lived a nobleman whose son was down with a high fever. This nobleman came to Jesus earnestly pleading for help as his son "was at the point of death" (Jn. 4:47). There's a saying in Beijing according to John Sung:

When you have a small sickness
Go to the Taifu (Doctor)
When you have a big sickness
Then you must go to Yesu

The nobleman had no way out of this crucial situation except Jesus. He could have found no better person than the Lord to help him. Why don't you also ask the Lord to help you out of your trouble?

Notice that Jesus at one word healed the sick boy instantaneously, at a great distance. Who can do this but God? What can quench the fever of death but the Water of Life?

Chapter V

To the Invalid, sick and abandoned Jesus Christ is the Physician of Life.

Around the pool of Bethesda by the Sheep market, or gate, in Jerusalem there lay a "great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered" — the incurables. These invalid, sick, were abandoned by their own people, but found a ray of hope for recovery from the moving of water in this pool. For they believed that the first to get into the pool, when the water became alive by action of an angel, would be healed. How often the water was "troubled" is not recorded, nor how many there were that were healed. The fact that there lay by the poolside a great multitude shows that there were no "miracle rallies" by action of angel nor by the Lord Himself.

What is more significant is that on this occasion our Lord healed only one out of perhaps several hundred, viz., a man who had an "infirmity" thirty and eight years. And it was He who took the initiative to ask this invalid if he needed to be made whole. For this poor man had given up hope of ever walking again, nor did He know there was a Saviour who could heal him.

Yes, it is to the hopeless ones that Christ comes. He seeks us out who are destitute and derelict. He reveals Himself the Saviour of God by delivering us from our hopeless situation.

And He does it for our good against all the odds that surround Him — the intolerable, legalistic traditions of the Jews in Sabbath keeping. Pharisaical legalism is like grave clothes binding a corpse which must be ripped away for true religion to thrive: for the saving of soul and body. As for the Jews they had not lifted a finger to relieve the suffering of these invalid, sick and abandoned.

It is interesting to note that from the argument about the Sabbath the Jews came to further verbal blows with the Lord as regards His person and work. This leads us to a wonderful, deeper lesson of theology! Do you begin to like the study of theology?

Jesus Attends Every Feast

Whether this feast was the feast of Pentecost or Passover, Jesus attends every one that is required of Jewish males under the Mosaic Law. There are three of them according to Deut. 16, which are the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Deut. 16:16, 17 says, "Three times a year shall all the males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread (Passover), and in the feast of weeks (Pentecost) and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessings of the Lord thy God which He has given thee."

Thus, when Jesus had reached the age of 12, the age of a Jewish boy being admitted to the Church, He was seen at the Passover with His parents, and "in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors." It can be presumed that ever since that first Passover Feast, our Lord had visited Jerusalem every year, for He came not to destroy the Law of Moses, but to fulfil (Matt. 5:17).

What an example is set for us in Church attendance! While we now do not keep the Mosaic ceremonies, these being fulfilled in Christ, there is the Lord's Day that we should, when we all go to Church on Sunday (Heb. 10:25). There is the Lord's Supper that is observed in most churches every first Lord's Day of the month, which we should never miss. And the weekly prayer meeting, "for where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20).

It is said that some members see their pastor only three times in all their life — baptism at birth, wedding solemnisation in adulthood, funeral in old age. God forbid!

Angel at work!

The sheep market is thought by some to be the sheep gate (Neh. 3:1; 12:39). Bethesda is the Aramaic name of the pool. It means House of Mercy, inasmuch as the pool is adorned and sheltered by five porches, giving it a sheltered effect.

Some modern commentators, arguing from the omission of "awaiting for the moving of the water" of v. 3 and all of v. 4 in certain ancient manuscripts, take a naturalistic view of the healing. They regard the pool of Bethesda no more than a spa or health-spring. But the difficulty in such argument is that spas and health-springs might help somewhat. To effect a cure of the incurable requires divine power. In this case, the ancient Church believed, as did these invalid, sick and abandoned by Bethesda pool, the healing dispensed through the pool was by the agency of an angel. But it was to the faithful, persevering and earnest ones, who got into the water first, that cures were given. God had to limit grace to a few to find out who were the faithful to receive it. In Matt 11:12 Jesus says that it is the violent who by force takes the kingdom of heaven. Scofield comments, "It is the violently resolute who would press into it." Apparently, the man who was an invalid for 38 years had the resolute spirit, but lost out to others because of his physical handicap. Is it for this reason that Christ came to deliver him? "Men ought always to pray and not faint" (Luke 18:1).

A word from Calvin on the miraculous healing by angelic power: "Yet as a witness for the Temple and the sacrifices and the whole of that worship from which salvation was to appear to the world, the Lord retained among the Jews this gift of healing so that they might be aware that God had not separated them from the other nations in vain. By healing the sick God showed openly, as by a hand stretched from heaven, that He approved the kind of worship that they received from the commands of the Law."

With the advancement of medical science today by God's increased common grace to mankind, are not devoted Christian doctors and nurses angels too? Then there's another angel by the name of Nightingale!

John 5:8-16

Jesus saves the Sabbath from the Sanctimonious

One law that God has given man for his spiritual and physical well-being in a life of ceaseless toil is the Sabbath. One day in seven to rest from his menial labours, that he may keep it in holy rest and worship.

The Pharisees who were zealous to keep God's laws became so extreme in their demands that they would not allow you, in today's context, to switch on or switch off a light during the Sabbath hours. This is argued from the man who was stoned under Moses' law for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day (apparently to light a fire) Num. 15:32. For the man invalidated for thirty-eighty years now healed to carry his "bed", or bedding, and walk away from the sick bay was considered a near-unpardonable sin.

Thus when the hungry disciples plucked ears of corn to eat on the Sabbath Day the Pharisees accused them of breaking the Sabbath. They were wise in their sterile thinking, never considering there's the higher law of human necessity that overrides the law of sabbath keeping. "The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). And He who is the giver of the Sabbath law is Lord of the Sabbath! If Jesus heals on Sabbath Day so that physical work is involved, then it is sacred work that "breaks" the Sabbath for good!

The Larger Catechism says, "The Sabbath or the Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all that day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship . . ." What are some of the works of necessity and mercy that can exempt us from Sabbath keeping? (The Lord's Day is called the Christian Sabbath).

A Higher Work by a Higher Personage

Inasmuch as Christ has declared Himself Lord of the Sabbath elsewhere, He now discloses that His work is God's work. Calvin says, "What Christ insists on is that God's works do not disturb the holy rest commanded by the Law of Moses. And for this reason He excuses not only His own action but also the man's carrying his bed (bedding), which was a supplement, and as it were a part of the miracle, in that it was simply proof of it. Moreover, if thanksgiving and the proclamation of His glory are reckoned among the works of God, it was no profanation of the Sabbath to bear witness to God's grace with feet and hands. But Christ is speaking chiefly of Himself, for the Jews were more hostile to Him. He says the health He restored to the sick man is proof of His divine power. He declares that He is the Son of God and asserts that He acts in the same way as His Father. . . .

"His defence irritated rather than calmed their fury. . . . By His example He taught us never to yield to the fury of the wicked but to try to defend the truth of God when need arises."

In v. 18 we see the fury of the Jews flaming in their faces as John the author of the Fourth Gospel had beheld that day, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making Himself equal with God." This verse is one proof text on the equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father, that refutes the Jehovah Witness' heresy against the full deity of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

On the persons of the Holy Trinity, the Larger Catechism says: "There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, **equal** in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties."

The Oneness of Son and Father in Decision and Action

The Jews' accusation of Jesus for making Himself equal with God becomes the occasion when our Lord reveals His relationship with His Father. What relationship? Perfect love (v. 20)! Perfect love brings oneness of Son and Father in decision and action. Equality merely speaks of rank, and for the Son to occupy such a position is no usurpation on his part (Phil 2:6) because the Son is God inasmuch as the Father is God. The Christian readily worships the Son as he worships the Father, which gives recognition to the Son's honoured position. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which has sent Him" (v. 23). By this statement Christians are accepted, and Jews who reject Christ are condemned.

What we are more interested in this long passage, v. 17-30 is the relationship between Son and Father, as noted above. Because the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father we see a oneness of decision and action between the two Persons. Moreover the Father delegates His authority to the Son (v. 22 and v. 27), reveals His plan to the Son (v. 20) and "he will show him greater works than these that ye may marvel." On the other hand, we see the Son carrying out all the Father's plans in perfect harmony with His will (v. 30).

What are the greater works that the Son will do as the Father sheweth Him? Greater than healing the invalid of 38 years? The saving of our souls, the raising of our bodies to life everlasting and the condemnation of the wicked.

Christ is Saviour to the believing (v. 24) and Judge to the unbelieving. All in perfect oneness of decision and action with the Father. If the Jews know this they will not be offended when Jesus makes Himself equal with God the Father. Memorise 5:24.

Larger Catechism Q.11. How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?

A. The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.

Argument From the Law of Evidence

One vital principle of the Law of Moses in the trial of a person involving life and death is the requirement of corroboration by two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6). This principle has become a universal law of evidence. Jesus uses this law of evidence to silence the Jews who refute His Sonship and equality with the Father, for they do not believe that Jesus is God.

Jesus proves His Sonship and equality with the Father, that He therefore is God, by calling on a four-fold witness. (This is twice the number required by the law of evidence).

1. John the Baptist. If the Jews believe in John the Baptist, why then do they doubt his word that Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world? (v. 33-35).
2. His miracles, that transcend John's witness (v. 36).
3. The Father. (At Jesus' baptism, He spoke from heaven while the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove. Matt. 3:17).
4. The Bible, the Old Testament written by Moses and the prophets are sacred to the Jews who believe it to be God's infallible and inerrant Word. Moses wrote of the coming of a Prophet who is the Christ. Why did they not believe Moses' testimony of the Christ?

What a warning to us all, third and fourth generation Christians by tradition, but not by the new birth. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:13).

Another fourfold witness to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, are the Four Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. (The first three are called Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic comes from Synopsis which means a "collective or general view on any subject." Thus John's Gospel is written from his own angle. John, the beloved disciple and one of "the three" gives us his testimony of Christ from closest range).

Chapter VI

To the hungry multitudes of the World Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life

The feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four gospels. Compare Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17. This is one miracle experienced by such a multitude that it must have remained on the lips, with sweetness in the palate, for a long, long time. How even mothers and children would talk about the wonderful sandwiches they ate on that hill of Galilee for many years to come. While the Gospel is directed to the Salvation of the soul, for "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4) it is not slow to provide for our body in time of urgent need. The feeding of the five thousand is a miracle of relief for the hungry, these who have first hungered and thirsted after righteousness. The feeding of the five thousand teaches the Church to be forward in extending material help to the suffering brethren within (Acts 11:27-30) and also to the "brethren" without (Matt 25:31-46). But relief is given only in the hour of crisis.

It cannot be given when the emergency is over, because our Lord's ministry is mainly spiritual. Thus when some of the five thousand sought the Lord the next day, obviously not for the spiritual but rather the physical bread, our Lord refused them in no uncertain terms. For Christ's Kingdom is not "meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom 14:17).

The sequel to the feeding of the five thousand is our Lord's long discourse on the Bread that endureth unto everlasting life. The miracle bread from the five loaves and two fishes lasted but for a few hours for those who relished the outward, but endureth to this day and forever more in those who relished the inward. Reader, what bread are you seeking?

John 6:1-14

Lessons for the Ordinary from the Extraordinary

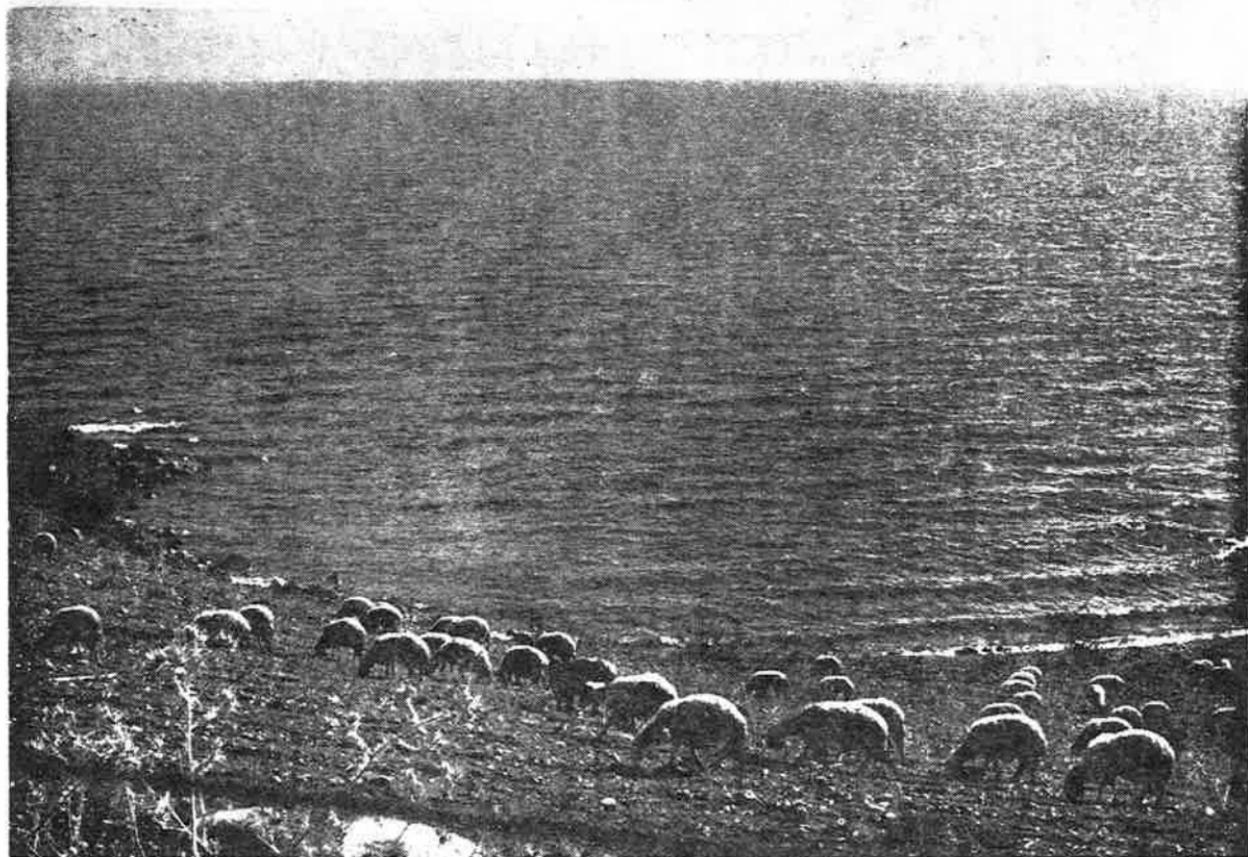
Do you know there is another instance of miracle mass feeding, viz., the feeding of four thousand with seven loaves and a few little fishes (Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10)? In this case the multitude has not had food for three days! How long was it that the five thousand had not eaten? Read the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt, Mark and Luke). One method of Bible Study is to read all the accounts to form a composite picture.

In John's Gospel, Philip is prominent as the "quarter-master," but he had no solution to feeding such a great crowd — 5,000 men, not counting women and children. Andrew who stood out as the recruiter of Peter his brother is now seen bringing a lad who has five loaves and two fishes. Let us learn from Andrew to be a good fisher of men.

In the working of the miracle it is recorded that Christ first gave thanks. Commenting on this Calvin says, "Christ has more than once taught us by example that we should begin our meals with prayer. For all those things that God has appointed for our use summon us to praise Him as symbols of His infinite goodness and fatherly love toward us. And thanksgiving as Paul tells us in I Tim 4:4 is a kind of solemn sanctification, so that the use of them begins to be pure to us. It follows that those who swallow them down without thinking of God are sacriligious profaners of God's gifts. And this teaching should be the more noticed, because we still see a large part of the world stuffing themselves like animals. By Christ's wanting the bread given to the disciples to increase in our hands, we are taught that God blesses our labour when we serve one another."

The picking up of twelve baskets of fragments teaches us the lesson of frugality. It is a sin to waste. Every grain of rice on your plate should be eaten! God is an Economist. And economy is the mother of prosperity.

God's greater bounty should not allow us the luxury of leaving behind uneaten good food, like the excesses seen at Chinese wedding dinners. Let those who abound realise they must give an account of their surplus possessions, if they do not carefully apply them to a good purpose.



Sheep grazing on the grassy slopes of Galilee (John 21: 15—17).

John 6:15-21

“With Christ in the Vessel, We can smile at the Storm”

For a fuller account of Jesus walking on the sea, read Matt 14:22-36; Mk 6:45-56. After the miracle of feeding the five thousand it is John who records that the people “would come and take him by force to make him a king” (Jn 6:15). As Christ came to found a spiritual kingdom and not a physical one as conceived by the masses, this greatly dismayed Him. To thwart the mob’s purpose our Lord “straightway constrained” His disciples to return home by boat while He dismissed the crowds, and stole away to give Himself to prayer (as He did at every crisis). How we must learn this secret of self-composure!

As the Lake is widest between the place of the miracle bread and the western shore, a strong head wind also slowing down the boat, the disciples took all night to try reach the other side. Jesus deserying the disciples struggling with their oars from land with divine eyes sailed with no less divine feet across the water to see if He could help. (It is Matthew who gives a more detailed account of Peter’s nervous walking on the waves in the steps of the Master). At first they were afraid because, as Mark tells us, they thought they saw a spirit. But Jesus comforted them, who surely recalled an earlier trip across the lake and the stilling of the storm by the Saviour. Thus assured, they must have rowed doubly fast to land in a short while. As an ancient proverb says, “A pleasant companion on the road is as good as a carriage”. Bunyan says, “When Christ is absent from His people, they go on but slowly, and with great difficulty; but when He joineth Himself unto them, Oh! how fast they steer their course! How soon are they at their journey’s end!”

Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go,
Anywhere he leads me in the world below.
Anywhere without Him dearest joy would fade,
Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid.
Anywhere, anywhere! Fear I cannot know!
Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go.

Is this also our quest?

Although Jesus had dismissed the crowds and sent His disciples by boat back to Capernaum His headquarters, the fed multitude persisted in the quest of their “king”. Boats from Tiberias on the southern shore also converged on the spiritual capital, but what the people sought after was the material. When the Church is established and offers good pay and position with fringe benefits, she has no worry of adherents. Is that the reason why some join the Church? Is the seeking after free bread also our quest?

Jesus plainly admonished these of the five thousand. As He did not get side-tracked to heal the multitude (Mk 1:37-39), so He refused to feed them again. Jesus answered them and said, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.” So, instead, He offered them bread that perisheth not which endureth unto life everlasting. For this they must labour. How? In v. 29, Jesus stresses again the importance of faith. Believing in Him, we receive Him, we obtain that bread that perisheth not but endureth unto everlasting life. Faith is what is needeth to obtain spiritual values, even salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is doing the works of God!

Both Martha and Mary were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Martha was encumbered with cooking and serving, which were undoubtedly necessary to give our Lord a good meal. Mary meanwhile sat at Jesus’ feet to hear His Word. Though Jesus did not discount the value of Martha’s labours, He could not help telling Martha that Mary had chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. Labouring for a comfortable life is good, but it is temporal. Labouring for salvation of one’s soul is better, for its values are everlasting. Memorise Jn. 6:27.

What Sign?

After all that these of the five thousand had seen and eaten of the miracle bread, they asked for a sign, as if Jesus were a total stranger to them. This reveals the wickedness of unbelief within them, and corroborates our Lord's condemnation of the Jews in Matthew 12:39, "This wicked generation seeketh after a sign." Indeed, they despise all other miracles they hitherto have seen, because Christ does not meet their wishes. Furthermore He has turned their attention to the spiritual which they dislike.

When they now begin to praise God for giving their fathers manna to eat in the desert, it is only to cover up their materialistic desires condemned by our Lord. They even call this heavenly bread. Again they miss the point. Though this bread came down from heaven, it was not from Moses but from God. It was given for a deeper meaning, to point them to Christ who is the One who came down from heaven, the True Bread, to give life to the world.

Now Jesus leads us into higher heights of the theology of conversion by giving us an insight into God's eternal decrees, the doctrine of predestination and election. Five thousand ate of the miracle bread, but how many did eat at the same time, inwardly, the "true bread from heaven" (v. 32)? After Jesus' long discourse on the Bread of Life, it is recorded, "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him" (v. 66). What a reflection on the constant turnover of church-goers. When demands are made on the hearers to give up their worldly pursuits and to embrace the cross, many return to their old habits — gambling, mahjong, Toto, drinking, smoking, sex, cinema, cabaret, Sunday sports, etc., etc.

It is only the elect, the chosen of God, that will stick on. Read v. 37, 39, 44, 45. But if you are elect, you will persevere in the faith to the end. Christ will raise you up in the last day (v. 39). You who believe sincerely belong to the elect and are saved forever! Memorise 6:37.

The Sign of the Cross

The sign of the cross is death! The cross was Rome's way of putting to death those condemned to die. Jesus was put to death on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Without His death we can never regain life, but by His death we have received life everlasting. And we cannot have this except by trusting in Him, by believing in Him with our whole being.

It is not enough to believe with our lips, nor with our heads. This is particularly the case of those who grow up in the Church, who being overwhelmed by long Christian tradition give mental assent. We must believe with all our heart, yea, right down to the stomach (innermost being). That was our experience with a Sunday school boy of 12 dying of a heart disease. This boy requested baptism before his death. After water was sprinkled on his head, the same asked if he needed to drink the water in the baptismal bowl also. This revealed the depth of his vibrant faith.

This is what Jesus means in the second part of His sermon on the Bread of Life. That Bread is His body and His blood. Except we eat His flesh and drink His blood we have no life. Except we believe, to the point of going with Him through death and sufferings, we are still outside Christ. Such faith is exemplified in the partaking of the Lord's Table. When we take the Lord's supper do we inwardly eat of His flesh and drink of His blood? If not, we still have not the life eternal. We are still unsaved, nominal Christians. Like the Jews who strove among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (V. 52). Like the Jews who heard Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum, retorted. "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" (v. 60). However their unbelief and our unbelief do not surprise the Lord. "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him" (v. 64).

The Preaching of the Cross is Power (II Cor 2:1-4)

While the great majority of the Galilean “disciples” left Christ, there remained, nevertheless, the faithful Twelve, except Judas Iscariot. This Jesus openly hinted, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (v. 70, 71) But there were others too. Of course Jesus’ mother Mary, and the other Marys, “and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:1-3).

How did these become so attached to the Lord? When Jesus tested their faith, “Will you also go away,” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the **words of eternal life**. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 68, 69). This is the deeper understanding of the elect, the saved ones through Jesus’ preaching. In v. 63 Jesus stresses the power of preaching, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (v. 63). But **what words?** The words of the sermon on the Bread from Heaven, His flesh and His blood that a man eateth shall never die. That is to say, the preaching of the cross, as attested also by St. Paul to the Corinthians (I Cor. 2:1-4). “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (I Cor 1:23).

Let our pastors and Sunday school teachers remember never to stray from the centrality of the cross in their preaching and teaching! So let us repeat again John Sung’s famous chorus, whose cleansing power we’ve felt from the thirties to this day:

In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever.
All our sins are washed away
In the Blood of Jesus!

Chapter VII

To those who imbibe of His Spirit Jesus Christ flows as Rivers of Life.

We have noted earlier that it was Jesus' custom each year to go to the Passover in Jerusalem. But not this year! Between the feeding of the five thousand and the feast of tabernacles, there is a wide gap of silence in John because the details of this period of half-a-year are given in the Synoptic Gospels. The reason why Jesus "walked in Galilee" and not in "Jewry" was that the Jews were seeking to kill Him. As His "time had not yet come" (v. 6) Jesus found it more profitable to make hay while the Galilean sun shone. To court danger unnecessarily is not of the wisdom of God. For staying in Galilee thus, our Lord invited the taunts of his unbelieving kinsfolk.

But our Lord never shrunk from the call of duty. He did leave for Jerusalem as the Feast of Tabernacles drew near. The Feast of Tabernacles, as earlier noted, was one of three great feasts of Israel. It was a feast to commemorate the wilderness sojourn when Israel dwelt in booths (Lev 23:33-44). Though our Lord arrived at the Feast of Tabernacles in the midst of the celebrations, His decision to face the music at the Passover to come in six months was His chief aim. Thus, He travelled to Jerusalem incognito, "not openly, but as it were in secret" (v. 10).

It must be remembered that Jesus at that time had become a national figure by His teachings and miracles and was the subject of daily discussions on everyone's lips. He did not want to be sidetracked by undue excitement in the populace.

Nevertheless, He fearlessly once again entered the arena of the capital city. His teachings immediately clashed with the traditions of the Jews. This led to another bout of debates with His opponents. But preaching is not dialogue but monologue, a declaration of "Thus saith the Lord" to whomsoever willing to hear. John 7 is best remembered by Christ's famous statement in vs 37, 38:" In the last day, that great day of feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Memorise this verse.

John 7:1-5

“And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

(Matt. 10:36)

This is one of Jesus’ famous paradoxical statements. Expanding on this statement, our Lord reiterates, “And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.” What’s the reason? “For my Name’s sake.” The cross of Christ becomes a sword (Matt 10:34) that divides the closest affections of human relationships, yea, within even one’s own household. Within the same church!

Our Lord did not speak these things from theory, but from personal experience. He was rejected by His townsfolk, the people of Nazareth, when He first started out to preach. Remember how He said earlier: “No prophet is accepted in his own country.” (Lk. 5:24). Now, as He comes to Nazareth again, most probably, He is taunted by His brethren, “for neither did His brethren believe in Him” (John 7:5). There’s a Chinese saying, “Difference in doctrine separates friends,” that elucidates. The prophet Amos says, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

Jesus Christ is the light of the world as we will see in the next chapter. As light and darkness do not mix, so He cannot compromise with his brothers who are in darkness.

Reader, are you facing a similar situation in your own home, being misunderstood and persecuted by your parents, husband, wife, brothers, sisters, uncle, aunt? Our Lord who has tasted these sorrows for Truth’s sake is beside you, to comfort and to cheer. Let the apostle Peter’s words conclude this brief study: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Pet. 4:12-16).

Time-table of Life

Our Lord's life was strictly programmed. He lived each day according to a divine time-table. This is reflected in His statement to His brethren, "My time is not yet come for my time is not yet **full** come" (v. 6, 8). And He knew it even to the hour (Jn 12:27). It was as it were that He wore a watch on one hand and looked at it ever so often to keep time with a programme sheet on the other. Such a conscientious spirit to fulfil a mission in life is revealed not only at this instance but on many other occasions. For example, to the disciples who brought Him food, He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work" (Jn 4:34). At the healing of the man born blind He declared, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (Jn. 9:4).

Herein is the secret of success. Jesus did not idle away his precious, short lifetime on earth for a single minute. Herein is also that secret of Paul's conquering the world for Christ. He also lived a life according to a divine time-table, so that in a brief span of 30-odd years he was able to preach the gospel throughout the Roman empire, from Jerusalem to the Imperial capital. Listen to his counsel to the Ephesians, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:17). To the Colossians, the apostle says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Col 4:5).

When we are saved, our time on earth should also be saved. Lord, save me from idleness, save me from time spent at the T.V. day and night. Save me to read Your Word daily and seek to know it more and more. Save me from "Sunday morning sickness" that I will worship You in Your House. Add to this list and your whole life will be revolutionised — as you live in tune with God's time-table for every victorious Christian.

Theology the Queen of Sciences

You can get a Ph.D in mosquitology, be able to count how many hairs there are on its proboscis, and you are recognised a scientist. It is Calvin who has stated that true knowledge (therefore the apex of knowledge) is that of God, and of man.

The Jews — scribes, lawyers, Pharisees, were scholars, well versed in the minutiae of Jewish law, but it was such a stagnated accumulation of man-made knowledge. When our Lord spoke, what a contrast! He who is the fountain of all wisdom and knowledge (Prov. 8), who comes down from heaven, from the bosom of the Father, teaches theology! The queen of sciences, the true and highest knowledge! And not forgetting man, whose soul is worth more than the whole world, He spoke plenty on humanity. This brings down His opponents to a momentary admiration, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" Were they not astounded when Jesus at twelve years of age sat in the temple among the doctors?

Now theology cannot be learnt like any other science. It cannot be learnt by an unconverted person: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor 2:14). "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). This is what our Lord means when He tells the Jews that His high source of theological knowledge, reposed in the Father, is beyond their grasp, unless they would do His will, be submitted to the Spirit of God." "If any man will do his will, he shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself." (Jn 7:17). If Jesus preaches only Himself with no reference to the Father, He would be teaching heresy, He would claim glory for Himself. But, He testifies otherwise. The Jews being blind in their own conceits could never understand theology. Hence they could not see in Jesus the Second Person of the Holy Trinity to this day. So it is with us. There are those who attend Church all their lives in modernist established churches, even elders and ministers of the Word, who deny the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. These are the modern scribes and Pharisees, blind leaders of the blind. Those who follow them will fall into the ditch (Matt 15:14). Calvin says, it is the humble who will understand theology!

Works of God are above the Sabbath Law for man

It has been noted that the Jews clashed with our Lord on a number of occasions on the observance of the Sabbath. Eighteen months after the healing of the man invalided for 38 years at the pool of Bethesda, this matter still simmered in the breast of the fault-finding Jews.

Knowing what was in their heart Jesus exposed their hypocrisy. "Did not Moses give you the law and yet none of you keepeth the law?" It was an open secret that the Sabbath was broken by the Jews themselves. This happened in the days of Nehemiah also. Read Neh. 13:15.

Jesus now posed before them the question, did not the Jews as a custom circumcise on the Sabbath? For Moses' Law says that a male child must be circumcised on the eighth day. Now when the eighth day fell on a Sabbath, would they circumcise or not? They would. And did not circumcision involve work? Yet Moses' Law at this point was not broken. "A higher law overrides a lower law." A work commanded by God, a work for the relief of human suffering, and for the meeting of an urgent need, would be exempt from the rigorous demands of law. Then why did they seek to kill our Lord? For doing works of mercy on the Sabbath Day?

"Judge not according to appearance" means not by the letter, and "judge righteous judgement" means by the spirit as well. There is a legal obligation but there is also a moral obligation.

What a wonderful **principle of equity is enunciated** by our Lord for our guide on keeping the Lord's Day holy today. There can also be extremes on our part, to dictate to our brethren what can be done and what cannot be done — on the surface of things. We must weigh every circumstance, and judge not by the letter only but also by the spirit. A good principle to remember is, the higher law of humanity overrides the lower law of ceremony. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"

“Never Man Spake Like This Man”

What a testimony by those officers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest our Lord. As we've noted, He taught not like one of the sterile one-track-mind Jewish lawyers. He taught with power and authority. When He spoke He stirred the heart strings, either to opposition, or submission. He spoke the Truth which He said would make a man free.

No prophet or philosopher spoke like Jesus Christ. On one hand the prophet spoke according to the Spirit of prophecy given him, nothing more. On the other, the philosopher gave whatever findings he had from long meditation. Christ spoke as the Word of God. He was God, speaking on behalf of the Father. Repeatedly he declared He did not come of his own, but the Father had sent Him. When threatened by His enemy He spoke enigmatically of His return to Him that sent Him. Herein lies the authority and power of His speech.

Not only did Christ declare His Heavenly credentials, He offered salvation to those who were lost, water to the thirsty that would well up from within the believer rivers of living water. Christ offered life to a dying world, but the condition was submission to the Son. He foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost who would hereafter energeise the Church. The philosopher, West or East, has never offered life to a dying world.

Neither could the Jews, who went about to establish their own righteousness in a vain keeping of the law. But Christ had come to do what Moses could not. O that the Jews today would come to Jesus Christ their Messiah. In our witnessing let us not forget that the Gospel should be given, in fact, first to the Jews. Tell your Jewish friend about Jesus.

**And ye shall know the Truth and the
Truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32)**

Jesus is the Truth. Our knowledge of Him determines our welfare. The types of people that come in contact with our Lord may be seen in that great crowd of people who gathered in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles.

1. There are the bigots — the Pharisees and chief priests, scribes and lawyers, members of the Sanhedrin, so set in their prejudices that they are sworn to killing Jesus. Are you also against Christ with that hatred?

2. There are those with a head knowledge of Scripture who could give a right answer in prophecy. They could identify the Christ to be of the seed of David and to come out of David's city — Bethlehem, but they did not take the trouble to find out from where Jesus of Nazareth actually came. Like a former professor of history at the University of Singapore who mistakenly wrote Christ was born in Nazareth (discovered by a deacon of Life Church who kindly wrote him, and for which he was ever grateful) these Jews arbitrarily concluded Jesus was a Galilean (by birth). Theoretical knowledge without verification can be heretical knowledge. Do you know of Christ in theory only?

3. There were those who were temporarily impressed, like the stony ground into which the seed was sown brought forth, but with shallow results. These were those Jews impressed by Jesus' learning, those officers who were sent to arrest Jesus but were thrown back by His charisma. Are you of this type?

4. There are those who are born again like Nicodemus (v. 50), who believed through the miracles Jesus had done that He was come from God. Many devout Jews who came from other parts of the world to the Feast (v. 31), like Nicodemus, recognised the Truth, that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. These were believing Jews who said, "Of a truth this is the Prophet" meaning to say, the one Moses had foretold in Deut. 18:15, 18. If you so believe, then the Truth will make you free, free from the bondage of the sin of wilful ignorance. Those who know Christ walk in the light. Those who believe not are bound in darkness.

Since Christ my soul from sin set free,
This world has been a heav'n to me.
And 'mid earth's sorrow and its woe
'Tis heav'n my Jesus here to know.

Chapter VIII

To men and women in dark pleasures Jesus Christ shines the Light of Life

The Feast of Tabernacles was now over (Ch 7:37) but our Lord did not return to Galilee. He remained in Jerusalem because He had finished His work upcountry. According to God's timetable, He must witness in the national capital. As the festive crowds in the city had taken up all lodging room, "and every man went unto his own house," Jesus retired to the Mount of Olives. He who said "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" had camped out there beneath the olive trees that night.

When Jesus returned to the Temple early in the morning, the scribes and Pharisees brought before Him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They wanted an opinion from Him whether this woman according to the Law of Moses should be stoned. This was a trap. As usual our Lord turned the tables on His enemy. Without an argument the accusers were dispersed. A Lawyer of lawyers and a Judge of judges, the Divine Master thwarts every cunning and craftiness of man.

Not willing to admit defeat, the Jews regrouped for more encounters. They resumed their challenge to His credentials because under Mosaic Law two witnesses at least are required for corroboration. Jesus replied that He had the corroboration of Another, His Father. Even if He stood alone, His testimony was true, since He spoke of things too deep for them to judge. This confrontation took place in the treasury of the temple, also known as Court of the Women. Jesus is the Master of polemical preaching.

It was a sharp encounter, and it was a marvel that the exasperated Jewish bosses let Him go. In the providence of God they were restrained by the popular support given to our Lord. "...and no man laid hands on Him; for His hour was not yet come." (v. 20). The higher restraining factor, however is God.

V. 21-30 is a new section. Here Jesus hints of His crucifixion (v. 28) and impending death and His return to the Father (v. 21-24). Once again He was rudely rejected.

V. 31-59 speaks of a final encounter insofar as this chapter is concerned. It is a long debate that ends with the unbelieving Jews trying to stone Jesus, but He got out safely from the Temple precincts.

The main topic is freedom. These Jews priding themselves to be Abraham's descendants and therefore of God thought they were a free people. This was a manifestation of their nationalistic spirit that made them oblivious to their enslavement under foreign powers—from Egypt to Rome. Jesus tried to show the freedom from sin that He was talking about. He pointed out their being

The Judge of Judges and Master-Lawyer

John 8:1-11

Readers of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) will find this passage of Holy Scripture belittled in small print, and of the New English Bible (NEB) relegated to the end of the Book like an appendage. The reason for so doing by the modernist translators of the said versions is that this passage is not found in some of the ancient manuscripts, and therefore it is no part of John's Gospel. We believe this account of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery to be the very Word of God. Scofield's footnote at this point supports our view. Homer A. Kent Jr., New Testament Professor of Grace Theological Seminary, quoting Leon Morris, says, "But if we cannot feel that this is part of John's Gospel we can feel that the story is true to the character of Jesus. Throughout the history of the church it has been held that whoever wrote it, this little story is authentic. It rings true." The Holy Spirit will tell you in your heart after you have read it whether it is a part of God's Word or not.

Now let us learn a beautiful lesson of transcendent wisdom from the Judge of judges. Here is a greater than Solomon. Here is a wiser than Daniel. See how at a word from the lips of the Master-Lawyer the trap that the Jews had sprung on Him boomeranged. The accusers became the accused. They became the more guilty, being pricked by their awakened conscience. The executioners became the executed.

Some inquisitive people try to guess what Jesus wrote. Some even claim revelatory knowledge from the Holy Spirit. This is impious query. This is self-deluding conceit. Let us learn from Calvin that where the Scripture is silent we should remain reverently silent — a good hermeneutical principle.

Euthymius Zigabenus, monk of Constantinople, writing in the 12th century, has good observation on the above situation: "Jesus stooped down and with His finger was writing on the ground, as they are often wont to do who are unwilling to answer inopportune and unworthy questions." May we call this action on His part, in the words of modern educators, "body language"?

From page 53

sons rather of the devil (v. 44) and their enslavement to sin. The only way out from the bondage of sin and death to freedom and life was through the Son. This brought the Jews into a second argument on Abraham in which Jesus revealed His pre-existence to Abraham's day. This statement again was challenged because the Jews judged our Lord to be under 50 years old. How could Abraham have seen Him who was dead many years? How the Jews missed point after point of the Word of Life. And you?

The Light of Life in a Dark Society

This is another scene of Jesus clashing with the Pharisees. Says Dr. David Smith in his three volume Commentary on the Four Gospels; "It is now late autumn, probably the month of October, when the days were short; and as He taught by the Treasury (cf. Mk 12:41 and Lk 21:1) the shadows of evening fell, and the lamps were lighted in the Temple-court. After His wont He turned the scene into a parable: "I am the Light of the world." We would add this observation with Scofield rather that the dark practices of the immoral Jews served also as a backdrop for His message.

Jesus' claim to be light of the world particularly offended the Pharisees. For this was a title reserved for the Messiah. In a lesser sense Rabbis were also styled "lights". Who was this young upstart to take such a title? They rejected Him because of His lack of credentials. Who was His reference?

Our Lord's reply was a double-barrel shot. 1) He was His self-authenticated witness. What He said of Himself was in a realm beyond the grasp of the Jews. They therefore could not prove Him wrong. 2) He had a second witness, according to Mosaic Law (Deut. 19:15), viz., the Father who had commissioned Him. However, the Father our Lord talked about was a riddle to them. For the way of knowing the Father was through the Son, but if they did not know the Son, how could they know the Father? The Jews were once again adjudged an ignorant crowd. No wonder they seethed with hatred to kill him.

Unless you sincerely believe and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, you will also deny Him to be Light of the world. At most you will give Him a place alongside Buddha, sometimes called "Light of Asia". Thus Jesus is taken to be one of many lights by one Southeast Asian cult called "Five Religion Society". Another that has Christ as one of its gods is the Red Swastika Society. And we can add many more to this list beginning with these unbelieving Jews.

The way to heaven rejected

Once again Jesus declared His origination from Heaven and intimated His soon return to Heaven. Once again He revealed His coming to earth from the Father above and His impending return to Him.

Such knowledge being too high for the natural man, He was taken to be contemplating suicide (v. 22). If such was His mentality, the madman, they concluded, was hellbound (the Jews believed those who committed suicide perished in their own sin).

Standing up to their ribaldry our Lord told them in no uncertain terms they would die in their sins if they persisted in their rejection of One who told them the Truth from the beginning (v. 25). For rejecting the Son, no wonder they could not receive our Lord's witness on the Father.

In v. 28 Jesus foretold how He would die. "When ye have lifted up the Son of man" means "when you have crucified the Son of man." It is in His death that they would discover His Sonship, His appointment and approval from God. Why? Because His death would be an unusual death, not a death like one undergone by you and me. It will be a death through which He would restore life to believing mankind by His resurrection from the dead. His resurrection would lead to His ascension and exaltation and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to a continuing ministry in the world.

It is heartening to note that despite the Jews' rejection of the Light of the world, there were others, "many," who believed on Him (v. 29). What an encouragement to us who preach Jesus that our sermons, despite rejection by some, find reception in others who believe.

Sons of Freedom

The previous section ended with a happy note: "As He spoke these words, many believed on Him" (v. 30). These believers are new born babes and need "the sincere milk of the Word" that they might grow thereby (I Pet. 2:2). Therefore our Lord continues to instruct these believing Jews that they might experience the fulness of salvation blessing. "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," He said.

The Jews, though enslaved by such foreign powers as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and now Rome in their long history, nevertheless, were a proud people. They prided themselves as Abraham's descendants, the chosen people of God. So they answered, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." This statement is obviously subjective!

Our Lord's message on freedom is a deeper one. It does not concern the political and the outward. It deals rather with the spiritual and the inward. Sons of Abraham the Jews are but they remain slaves to sin. Therefore they are not sons of freedom who could merely claim Abrahamic parentage. They are sons of freedom if they are freed from sin by Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. They are sons of freedom who are delivered from the bondage of sin.

It is of no benefit to the Jews to claim to be sons of Abraham in the flesh. They should rather be sons of Abraham in the spirit, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even as Abraham is "father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:11). So when the Jews pride themselves to be sons of Abraham and therefore sons of freedom, our Lord disprove them. For they do not behave like true sons of Abraham. They seek to kill Jesus, One who tells them the truth of God that can set them free from sin. They act contrary to the Abraham who had received Jehovah, the Christ of the Old Testament, gladly in his day (v. 56).

Sons of freedom are they who have believed in Jesus the Saviour of God whereby their sins are forgiven, and they are empowered to live a life free from bondage of sin.

Friday September 3

Proverbs 5

John 8:41-50

Sons of the Devil

The Jews not only prided themselves as Abraham's sons, but also as God's sons (v. 41). Were they not the chosen people? This attitude was manifested not only in their encounters with our Saviour, but also in their haughty attitude towards John the Baptist. This drew the Baptist's rebuke, "And think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham for our Father. . . ." (Matt 3:9). Earlier in the sermon the Baptist called them "generation of vipers" (Matt 3:7).

"Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will I not suffer" (Ps. 101:5). Jesus gives place to man, no, not for a second to a proud man. Therefore He tells these self-righteous Jews to their face, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Because I tell you the truth you do not believe me!" (NIV, 44, 45). How terrible! When a person rejects Christ after so much of the truth of the Gospel is given him, like darkness receding from shining light, he becomes a son of the devil. When a person rejects the words of Jesus, he takes Satan's side. And he will do what the Devil wants to do, to murder, to lie, to do all that is against the truth.

Thus, having rejected the Truth that would make them free, the Jews went from lying to maligning. They called Jesus a Samaritan. They called Jesus a devil, biting ferociously like a hunted beast at bay. Our Lord did not acquiesce to such blasphemy. He appealed to God. (v. 50). The Son of God fought a good fight for the truth with the sons of the Devil. This reminds us once again of the need of more polemical preaching today. To present the Gospel positively in a nice way is not in the Spirit of Truth, nor in the **tradition** of the Son of God. It is actually a compromise with the Devil.

A greater than Abraham

Having been defeated by our Lord in their claim to sonship in Abraham and were called sons of the devil instead, the Jews shifted their strategy to Abraham's preeminence. This was but a roundabout way of exalting themselves again.

When our Lord offered life never-dying to those who keep His saying (v. 51) the Jews retorted He was outdoing Abraham. Was He greater than Abraham who was now dead, and greater than the prophets who were also now dead? Jesus replied His greatness came not by Himself, but from God the Father whom the Jews denied to be their Father. He was conferred this greatness because He loyally obeyed Him (v. 55). Indeed, He was the eternal Son of God, the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Jesus referred to those theophanies to Abraham in which He was the One who appeared to their ancestor. This is what He meant when He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad (v. 56). Can you list the number of appearances God gave to Abraham from his call in Ur of the Chaldees to his offering of Issac?

Not realising Jesus was the Father's only begotten Son, "very God of very God" (Nicene Creed), now through the Virgin Mary become a Man, they ridiculed Him for not having even attained 50 years. Some think Jesus looked older than His age, but we think rather the age of 50 was mentioned because that was the age of a Levite's retirement (Num. 8:25). That is to say, Jesus in their eyes was only a young upstart. And He claimed to have seen Abraham — what monstrosity!

When Jesus declared His eternity to be at one with God, using the verb I AM which is based on the Hebrew imperfect tense which has no time limitation, the Jews thought it even more blasphemous. That is why they resorted to force, but Christ delivered Himself to prove to them His Deity in action.

Chapter IX

To the blind of body and spirit Jesus Christ is the Sight of Life.

John 9

When our Lord came to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles it was about the end of September. In this chapter we see Him in Jerusalem still, but now it was winter and the Feast of Dedication, also called the Feast of Lights, was at hand. It commemorates the cleansing and the dedication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus after its defilement by Antiochus Euphianes, 165 B.C. It is observed today by the Israelis as Hanukkah (Chanukah).

In this setting John tells of the healing of a man born blind, on the Sabbath Day. This brought Jesus to another bitter clash with the Jews, so bitter that He was obliged to leave the city (Jn 10:39). Do we see such polemics in the Church world today? Where is Mr. Valiant for the Truth?

The healing of the man born blind involved a deep question of theology. It was a settled dogma of the Jews that physical suffering was always punishment, implying sin previously committed (cf. Luke 13:1-5). But what about one born blind? This was also deemed punishment, but in this case the sin had a deeper origin. Two theories were propounded: 1) The affliction was hereditary (cf. Ex. 20:5); 2) The affliction was due to personal sin, even in the case of babies in the womb. The Jews would refer to Gen 25:22 which records of Rebekah that "the children struggled within her."

Furthermore, there was the Oriental belief in re-incarnation (transmigration of souls) familiarised by Pythagoras (582-500 B.C.) and Plato (427-347 B.C.). The belief in re-incarnation had thus crept into Jewish thought. (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 8:19, 20, an apocryphal book, and the philosophy of Philo). On this theory men reap in each successive incarnation what they have sown in the last. (David Smith). It is commonly believed by Buddhists that if you are wicked in this life you may be born into a pig in the next.

With these Jewish concepts came the disciples' question to the Master, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he should be born blind?" Into the darkness of Jewish speculation there shone a bright answer from the Light of the World: "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." (9:3). How it comforts our hearts that the sicknesses we've gone through may not all be due to sin, personal or parental. There is a higher Cause to sickness, God Himself! God uses sickness sometimes to show forth His power that those who experience His healing might witness to the Truth, that they might reflect the Light that is come into the world so the blind of spirit might have their inner eyes opened. Let's study if the blind leaders of the blind came to see the light?

The Light of the World versus Spiritual darkness

Here is a man born blind. Bishop J.C. Ryle comments: "Of all the bodily crosses that can be laid on a man, without taking away life, none perhaps is greater than the loss of sight. It cuts us from some of the greatest enjoyments of life. It shuts us up within a narrow world of our own. It makes us painfully helpless and dependent on others. In fact, until men lose their eyesight, they never realise its value."

Now blindness like every other infirmity is a fruit of sin. From Adam's fall we inherit not only his sinful nature, called original sin, but also bear the miserable consequences thereof. The curse of blindness is a darkness that smothers one's physical life till one dies. But there is a greater darkness that prevades our soul, the spiritual darkness that hides us from the way to Heaven, but enhances our fear of Hell.

It is Jesus Christ, the **Light** of the world that can dispel this spiritual darkness. Restoring the spiritual eyesight to a lost humanity is our Lord's mission, though He opens the eyes of the physically blind whenever He would. To achieve this He must take time by the forelock. He cannot waste a single minute, like a traveller racing against the setting sun: "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." Jesus had only a brief three-odd years to labour. No wonder He is seen always on the go.

Dr. John Sung was able to accomplish in 15 years what might take others 50. He knew from the Lord that his years were numbered, perhaps from the life of King Hezekiah. So he hastened. At every revival campaign he would preach three sermons a day, two hours per sermon.

William Burns, pioneer missionary of the English Presbyterian Mission to China was able to preach the gospel from Hong Kong in the south to Newchuang, Manchuria in the north of the continent of China, because he hastened. One characteristic of his life was that whenever he felt bogged down by trivialities he would withdraw from his friends: "I must run."

The Light of the world came to the Jews and shone brightly, but for a while, and then it departed out of their sight. Those who reject that Light are condemned to spiritual darkness forever.

“Is this Compatible with Modern Hygiene?”

A modern professor of theology asked his students a “progressive” question in regard to Jesus making clay with spittle to anoint the eyes of the blind man: “Is this compatible with modern hygiene?” Seemingly “progressive” seemingly harmless.

To speak disparagingly of our Lord’s work is as deadly as the old serpent’s sting. When this classroom attack on our Lord was related to a Christian doctor, he replied with a twinkle in his eyes, “From a medical standpoint, our saliva contains certain enzymes that kill germs.” So a doctor of theology should have learnt a little medicine before he spoke outside of his field of knowledge. Says Dr. David Smith, “Saliva was credited by ancient physicians, Jewish and Gentile alike, with medical efficiency especially in ophthalmic distempers (diseases)”.

Do you know that in two other instances of healing, Jesus used the same “prescription”? There is the account in Mark 7:33-35 where Jesus spat and touched the deaf and dumb man’s tongue. And the other, also in Mark, 8:23-25, where he spat on the blind man’s eyes. If saliva is incompatible with hygiene, ancient or modern, why did our Lord use it again and again?

We cannot question our Lord whether using spittle measures up to modern hygiene. We can only submit to any “prescription” our Lord uses, as a dying man needing an operation is put into a surgeon’s hands.

Why did Jesus use spittle and clay and why did He send the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam? Let Bishop Ryle answer for us: “The direction here given to the blind man would remind any pious Jew of Elisha’s directions to Naaman, “Go, wash in the Jordan” (II Kings 5:10) By the command was a test of faith, and in obeying the blind man found what he wanted. It is the great principle which runs through scripture — “Believe and obey and all will be right.”

We would stress further that obedience must be that of abject submission to the Lord of Lords even as His saliva-clay humiliates its recipient. It is said that Hindu worshippers of the cow are so given to their four-footed goddess that some would drink her milk with a teaspoon of her droppings to express their devotion. And we and our Lord?

The Pool of Siloam

The Pool of Siloam is identified with that which is today located at the southeast part of the City of Jerusalem. The waters come from the Gihon Spring via the tunnel built by King Hezekiah (II King 20:20; Chron. 32:30). It is thought that when Jesus declared Himself the living waters at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37, 38) He was using a figure from the waters of Siloam, which were used at this season to symbolise God's blessings.

The significance of washing at the Pool of Siloam finds a penetrating interpreter in Matthew Henry. He says, "The waters of Siloam had of old signified the throne and kingdom of the House of David, pointing to the Messiah, Isa 8:6, and the Jews who refused the waters of Shiloah, Christ's doctrine and law, and rejoiced in the tradition of the elders. The evangelist takes notice of the signification of the name. Christ is often called the Sent of God; the Messenger of the covenant, Mal. 3:1; so when Christ told him to go to the pool of Siloam, he did in effect send him to Himself, for Christ is all in all, to the healing of souls. Christ, as a prophet, directs us to Himself, as a Priest. Go, wash in the fountain opened, a fountain of life, not a pool.

The cure was effected, the man came seeing. Here is an instance, 1. Of the power of Christ. What cannot He do, who could not only do this, but do it thus? No doubt this is He that should come. 2. It is an instance of the virtue of faith and obedience. This man let Christ do what He pleased, and what He appointed him to do, and was cured. They that would be healed by Christ must be ruled by Him. He came back from the pool wondering, and wondered at. He came seeing. This represents the benefit gracious souls find in attending on instituted ordinances according to Christ's appointment. They have gone to the pool of Siloam weak, and have come away strengthened; have gone doubting, and come away satisfied; have gone mourning, and come away rejoicing; gone trembling, and come away triumphant; have gone blind, and come away seeing, come away singing, Isa 52:8."

The Pool of Siloam is the Pool, yea Fountain, of Him sent by God. Have you washed in this Pool that you may look not to the temporal things of this world, but to the eternal in the heavens?

Faith Tested Under an Ecclesiastical Gestapo

If we read between the lines, we can gather what took place as the blind man, besmeared with clay, wended his way to the pool. A crowd followed to see if his eyes would really open. As he washed, and washed, suddenly he cried, "Hey, I can see! I can see!" A greater crowd gathered as he hurried home to tell his people.

Jesus who had had many clashes with the Pharisees, representing the Jewish ecclesiastical authorities, was now under "ban". This put a fear not only into the hearts of the sympathetic but also of the blind man's parents. That is why they dared not exult in the healing of their son. When accosted by the Pharisees they rather retreated into their shell: "We know not; he is of age; ask him; he shall speak for himself" (v 21). So did the rest of the people waver, under an ecclesiastical Gestapo, as they began to express their doubts (v 8, 9). Those responsible to the Jews even took him to a cross examination by the Pharisees (v 13). What a terrible let down! Says Dr. David Smith at this point, "Instead of rejoicing in their neighbours' good fortune, those people, to clear themselves of the suspicion of complicity, dragged him before the Pharisees, that is, the rulers of the synagogues who had pronounced the ban. It was indeed a serious case, since it was the Sabbath Day and the miracle was thus a violation of the Rabbinical law of Sabbath observance; yet it perplexed the dignitaries. For while some of them saw only the illegality of the miracle, others felt the wonder of it and recognised it as an evidence of our Lord's divine commission; and when in the hope of obtaining fuller light on the case they appealed to the man — a mere lad, intelligent and nimble witted, very different from the old paralytic of Bethesda, he stoutly supported his Benefactor: "He is a prophet."

"Truth", according to Zorobabel, "endureth, and is always strong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore." (I Esd. 4:38). St. Paul says, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." (II Cor. 13:8).

Let Dr. David Smith retell more vividly the whole story: "There was nothing for it but to enter upon a judicial investigation

First arose the question whether it were a genuine case and not an imposture, and to ascertain this they cited his parents and, removing him meanwhile from the court, addressed to them a threefold interrogation: 1) Was he their son? 2) Had he really been born blind? And if so, 3) how had he now his sight? The first two questions they unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative, but the third was dangerous in view of the menace of ex-communication, and they evaded it. "Ask him," said they (according to the true order): "he is of age," literally "he hath age," meaning that he was old enough to speak for himself, not, as the phrase suggests with us, that he had turned twenty-one but that, according to Jewish usage (cf. Lk ii. 42), he was over twelve. Thus balked, they recalled the lad and laid a trap for him. "Give glory to God" said they, meaning not, as our version suggests, "Ascribe the praise of the miracle to God," but "Glorify God by confessing the truth" (cf. Josh vii. 19): Give glory where it is due my son, even though it is manifest by thy shame Once more I charge thee to consult thy soul's weal by glorifying Heaven and speaking the truth."

Their pretence was that they had elicited the facts from his parents and it was useless for him to persist in the imposture. "Give glory to God. We know that this fellow is a sinner," "Be that as it may," he stoutly replied, "one thing I know — that whereas I was blind, now I see." Thus checkmated, they reverted to their original question, how the thing had been done, hoping that he might be betrayed into some inconsistency. But he met them with a cutting sarcasm. "I have told you already; why would ye hear it again? Would ye also become His disciples?"

They made the fatal blunder of losing their tempers. "Thou art a disciple of the fellow," they stormed: "but we are disciples of Moses. This fellow — we know not whence he is." The lad was blessed with a gift of humour, and keeping cool he fastened on their confession and lectured them with superb insolence: "Why, herein is the marvellous thing! He opened the eyes of one born blind — an unprecedented miracle, impossible without God, yet ye wise men, the teachers of Israel, 'know not whence He is!'" This ended the case.

"Dost thou teach us?" they cried; and "they cast him out" — not merely out of doors but out of their fellowship, excommunicating him."

The day is coming when those who witness for Christ will be similarly tested. Will we stand the test?

Christ and Follow-up

Though a believer is forcibly separated from his congregation, as in the case of this blind man, he is not homeless. In fact, he should come out of such a foul ecclesiastical system, as commanded in II Cor 6:14-18 (Here is the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation for the sake of truth and purity). And when he comes out, there is the Father to receive him.

In this case, our Lord who meets with him after the excommunication is the Father. It is a follow-up by the Chief of pastors. What is most important in our follow-up? To ground the new believer in the Faith. Our Lord now reveals Himself to the new believer that He is the Son of God. And with that the whole doctrine of His Person, yea, even of the Trinity and all that is in the Apostles Creed is included. The more we know of Christ, the more will we submit to His benign authority. "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him." (v 38).

Let Dr. David Smith conclude our remarks on this chapter: "A crowd had gathered, including some of the Pharisees who had pronounced the sentence of excommunication and were jealously watching the offender. And here our Lord found an opportunity for enforcing the lesson of His dealing with the latter. It was, as we have seen, an acted parable, a picturesque appeal to the blinded people of Jerusalem to open their eyes to "the Light of the World." "It was for judgement," said He, "that I came into the world, that the unseeing may see and the seeing be made blind." By their attitude toward Him men passed sentence on themselves. If they did not welcome the light, they proved themselves blind (cf. iii 19). This touched the pride of the Pharisees. "Are we too blind?" they interposed — we, the teachers of Israel? And He retorted with a stinging sentence. "Had ye been blind, ye had not had sin. As it is, ye say 'We see': your sin remaineth." Well for them had they been ignorant as the despised multitude, since they would then have been excusable. They knew better, and that was their condemnation."

Chapter X

To His own sheep who hear His word Jesus Christ is the Door of Life.

This famous chapter on the parable of the Good Shepherd should be studied with Chapter 9 as its background. It is given on one hand as a rebuke to the unbelieving Jews and professional churchmen, and on the other as an assurance to believers, with an appeal to all and sundry who would put their trust in Him, near and far.

Jesus' claim to deity by referring to the Father working in concert with him and He with the Father became the flash point of contention again. The Jews surrounded Him at Solomon's porch in the temple precincts. (As mentioned in the last chapter our Lord was now at the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukka, the Feast of Lights, about the same time as the Christmas season). They wanted Him to declare once and for all if He was their expected Messiah (**Messiah** is the Hebrew meaning **Anointed**, is **Christos** in Greek and Christ in English). Jesus answered with the same sarcastic logic He had put in the blind man's answer to the Pharisees earlier (9:27): "I told you, and ye believeth not" (v 25). Then, using the law of evidence again to prove His point, He cited the testimony of His miracles in the Father's Name as one irrefutable proof of His Messiahship. He also revealed to them the mystery of their unbelief, despite a hundred proofs being given, and that mystery resided in the fact that they were not His sheep. They did not belong to that circle of saved ones whom the Father had elected to give Him the Son (cf. In 6:37). But those who are saved, and therefore listen to His Word, are saved forever (v 27, 28). In doubly-assuring His sheep of the everlasting life He offered them, our Lord claimed once again His equality with the Father (v 30). This invited another threat of stoning because the Jews could tolerate His claim to miracles, but not at all His claim to Godhood. To which our Lord had an argument from Scripture according to Ps. 82:6. How wonderful is God's Holy Word that offers us a ready answer to the assailants of truth.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan three times during forty days in the wilderness did He not vanquish His foe by thrice quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy? (Memorise I Pet 3:15).

A parable, according to Chambers Dictionary, is a comparison; a fable or story of something which might have happened, told to illustrate true doctrine, or to make some duty clear. (The word parable is made up of two Greek words: para = beside + ballein = to throw).

Scofield lists 40 parables from the Synoptic Gospels, but leaves out this only "parable" in John. John's parable is more of a "similitude".

Can you identify the characters and objects in this parable? How many categories?

1. Our Saviour is the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Pasture.
2. The undershepherd, the pastor, is the porter; the sheep-fold the Church, the sheep are the saved ones, believers. Other sheep are the Gentiles afar off who are to be evangelised and brought into the Church.
3. The false teachers are the thieves and robbers, the strangers, the wolves.
4. The professionals are hirelings. Bishop Ryle in his day says, "Thousands of ordained in the present know nothing whatsoever about Christ, except His name."

What are the characteristics of the four categories above?

1. The Saviour invites us to come to and through Himself (the Door). He calls us by name and leads us to pasture, to more abundant life. He gives His life to save His sheep. He is concerned for other sheep to be brought into the Church.
2. The pastor who opens the Door serves the local church faithfully and waits on the Chief Shepherd. He opens the Door that the sheep might come in and out. Every pastor should be a soul winner.
3. The false teachers take preeminence over the Master, or steal into the Church by climbing over the fence or breaking through, in order to destroy the flock (Jude 4). They are also wolves (Acts 20:29).
4. The professionals, hirelings, when they see the church attacked by the false teachers could not care less for the souls of the members. They run away when the going is rough.

Every true member of the Church of Jesus Christ has an unction from the Holy Spirit so that they can recognise who's who is the Church, for good or for bad. Memorise I John 2:20 and read v. 27. This is what is meant by "my sheep hear my voice" and "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him" (v 5). Every Christian has a duty to keep heretical teachers from the pulpit.

What is Eternal Life?

According to Chambers Dictionary, eternal means “without beginning or end of existence”; everlasting: ceaseless. The eternal life that our Lord gives to those who hear His voice (v 27), that is, who believe in Him and obey Him, is life that has no end, everlasting. Some Christian teachers, however, say we can lose that life when we sin again.

Sin, of course, is a terrible thing. It brought us into the misery of death and hell when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Can a Christian lose his salvation when he falls into sin again? Hebrews 10:26 does warn against wilful sin which seems to be connected to v 29 with those “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.” Will a truly born again Christian revile His Saviour as stated above? If so, he is in the gravest danger. But we think not. A truly born again Christian must love His Lord, and when he sins, he has “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins . . .” I Jn 2:1, 2. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I Jn 1:9). We do not think a Christian will lose his salvation, for the life given him is eternal, everlasting.

Therefore eternal life is everlasting life, and everlasting life is life that continues forever and ever without being cut off even for a short duration. Therefore Christians have, in theological language, “eternal security”. This is what Jesus means when he says, “And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” To doubly assure us of His keeping power that we should not be lost, He adds, “My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” (v 28, 29).

Let us conclude with Calvin’s quotation of Jonah 2:9, “Salvation is of the Lord.” Praise the Lord, we are saved not because we are good enough, but because He is good to us. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us . . .” (Titus 3:5). Memorise this verse.

The Unique Claims of the Good Shepherd.

Did it occur to you that no other person in the world, not one among the prophets or philosophers, ever made such claims as our Saviour? Though Plato had said that every philosopher should be a king, and Confucius talked of the princely man, there is none among their fraternity that has made such claims as our Lord.

In this chapter our Lord declares Himself the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Pasture. Now, the shepherd of Psalm 23 which we all know so well is none other than the LORD. Note the four capital letters, L-O-R-D. This is the King James translators' way of showing the Divine Name JEHOVAH. The good shepherd is Jesus' claim to Jehovah, the God of Israel, in the Old Testament. The Door has reference to the entrance to the Temple, the Way of approach to God. Hence, according to Psalm 84, the exultation of one as a "door-keeper in the house of my God." The pasture speaks of good provisions to the sheep which brings to mind Psalm 100 where God's people are called "the sheep of His Pasture." (v 3). Against such claims to Godhood and Saviourhood, the Jews, the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers, blind guides of the blind, insofar as the immediate context is concerned, are thieves and robbers, strangers and wolves, while professionals in the Service of the Church are called hirelings. Here is the argument for our Lord's Divinity — His claim to all the powers and virtues of Divinity. If these claims are not true, He must be the greatest impostor and megalomaniac.

He claims to be the author of Life. He foretells His death and His resurrection. It is these divine claims that caused a building up of opposition from the unbelieving Jews until it burst over His head in His arrest, trial and crucifixion.

But His fearless testimony of Himself did yield results. While some called Him a devil and a madman, there were others who took His side (v 19-21). On which side are you?

Another Claim of Equality with the Father

In the encounter with the Jews after the healing of the paralytic of 38 years, Jesus' claim to partnership with the Father in His work roused the Jews' resentment. For they perceived that if such claims were true, then Jesus was claiming God to be His Father, "making Himself equal with God."

In this chapter Jesus claims to give life everlasting to His sheep and guarantees life to be imperishable because He keeps it with His hand, and such security is reinforced by the Father's hand. He claims again that the Father is working alongside Him. But our Lord goes further. He declares: "I and the Father are one". This speaks not only of equality in power but equality in essence.

It is from such Scripture passages that the authors of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms frame their doctrine on the deity of Christ and His equality with the Father and the Spirit.

Q 11 of the Larger Catechism: How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?

A. The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, **attributes, works,** and worship, as are proper to God only.

"I and my Father are one" refers to Christ's **attributes** and **essence** being at one with the Father. This makes Him equal to God, which provoked a barrage of stones about to be discharged by the offended Jews. This made the Jews to accuse our Lord of blasphemy. Again they retorted in their hardened unbelief, "For a good work we stone thee not: but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."

There are many educated people today who can accept Jesus Christ as a prophet, even the Muslims. But they reject Him to be God's Son, equal with God the Father. But remember an earlier warning, from our Lord, "For if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." Do you kneel to Jesus Christ the Son of God, God of very God?

Jesus Christ, the Master-Logician

The Jews took up stones to stone Jesus because they were angry that He being a man made himself God. Jesus stood His ground, unafraid, to defend His cause. He asked them a question from the Old Testament, the Bible of the Jews. Quoting Psalm 82:6 He said, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, Ye are gods'. If He called them gods (**Elohim** in Hebrew, the same word used for **GOD**) unto whom the word of God came, (and the Scripture cannot be broken), Say ye of Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him."

What Jesus has quoted from the Jews' own Scriptures gave them no leverage to answer. What Jesus challenged them was this: "Is it not written in your Law that those who have God's Word (the judges of Israel) are called gods? If these who ruled over Israel were called gods, how can you say that I blaspheme when I tell you I am the Son of God, I whom the Father has set apart and sent into the world? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father." If human judges were called gods in ancient Israel, Jesus the One whom God has sent from heaven to be the Saviour of mankind is worthy a thousand times more to be called Son of God. Can such logic be refuted?

The fact that the Jews had no answer and resorted to physical force speaks for itself. Jesus Christ, the Master-Logician!

Is it cowardice to run?

We see in the remaining verses of this chapter our Lord's becoming a fugitive again. Is it cowardice to run? Was it cowardice on Paul's part to escape out of Damascus in a basket "let down by the wall"? It is not cowardice to run before one's time is up. Our Lord "regarded death as going home" (to use a Chinese proverb) when He knew His time to die was nigh. So did the apostle Paul when at last he was taken to Rome. Before one's appointed hour with God, there's the injunction from our Lord to the Twelve, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another" (Matt 10:23).

For the location of His retreat, we have further light from Matt 3:1, 13. In Matt 19:1 we have the fuller expression, "the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan" or "the region of Judea to the other side of Jordan" (NIV). Ellicott thinks this location is to the north of the Sea of Galilee on the eastern side of the River Jordan. This location is the Golan Heights taken by Israel from the Syrians, in the Six-Day War, 1967.

How long did He stay there? From the Feast of Dedication to Passover was a period of four months (December to April). In between there is the return to the Capital outskirts, to Bethany, for the raising of Lazarus, and a certain time spent in a city called Ephraim, "near to the wilderness" (Jn 11:54).

The old faithfuls, converted in the earlier days of His ministry, followed Him there. What a contrast with the rebellious Jews in Jerusalem. How it must have encouraged our Lord to see the Gospel flourishing in them despite the persecutors, and through them new ones drawn into the kingdom. The people, when comparing John the Baptist with Christ inferred Christ was **more** excellent because Christ's miracles were so remarkable, whereas John did not perform any. They did however conclude that John worked no miracles for Christ's sake, that He might be more highly esteemed (Calvin).

Christ's retreat beyond Jordan was used of God to produce more fruit. It was no cowardice to run at this juncture of His life.

Chapter XI

To both dead and living believing Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life

Although this is the first time that Lazarus, Mary and Martha are mentioned in John, the two sisters are wellknown to us by Luke's account (10:38-42). With Lazarus revealed here as one Jesus loved, we have a complete picture of the Bethany Trio.

Two miles from Jerusalem by a slope of the Mount of Olives on the Jericho Road, was Bethany. There lived together the two sisters and their brother, an apparently well-to-do family. This is one family that had received Jesus Christ not only into their house but also into their heart. How our Lord and His disciples were encouraged by their loving reception and warm hospitality whenever they passed through en route to Jerusalem.

Now it happened that during the period our Lord was gone from Jerusalem to beyond the River Jordan, Lazarus fell ill. This illness was a serious one, so that a messenger was sent to ask Jesus to come. When our Lord received the news He perceived it was another occasion planned of the Father whereby God's Name would be greatly magnified. He was given the knowledge that this sickness would end in death but as Lord of Life He would raise Lazarus from the dead. This would be a final demonstration of His Messianic mission, that He came not to fulfil the political desires of His countrymen, but to save all mankind from sin and death. Our Lord had before this time raised Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:49) and the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11). Now He was to do it again, a triple confirmation of His Sonship. He purposely delayed coming in order that Lazarus, now stinking after four days, might give a greater testimony of His power.

The disciples who had retreated with Him to beyond Jordan, sensing the danger of returning to the metropolis, tried to dissuade our Lord from going. Thomas, at this point, seemed resigned to their fate. Jesus, nevertheless, encouraged them, that nothing could harm them until their appointed task was done.

The raising of Lazarus is the last straw of Jesus' acts that breaks the camel's back of Jewish tolerance. Now they plot to get Him at all costs. Christ must be put to death. Such rejection of the truth is not surprising when we hear what Abraham says to the rich man in hell, "If they have Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

But, to both dead and living believing, Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life.

John 11:1 O Bethany, my Home Sweet Home!

The House at Bethany that had been our Lord's resting place on the way to Jerusalem was suddenly overtaken by trouble. Lazarus was sick and going to die. They who had been the Lord's host and hostesses now had confidence of finding Help in time of need. "Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." (v 3).

There's a Chinese saying, "If you have no guest at home, neither can you find a host abroad." Hospitality is a virtue exhorted upon Christians by the Apostle to the Hebrews, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2) How much more important it is for Christians to entertain the Lord, the Chief of angels! How great is the honour and how plentiful are blessings that flow therefrom. If you have lived in close communion with the Lord Jesus, if you have laboured for His cause, if you have served His church loyally and faithfully, your prayers to Him for help in time of need will also be heard. This Martha tried to do in her womanly way by cooking nice meals for the Lord. In this respect the ladies of our church who look after the kitchen are blessed — if they serve Him lovingly, and not for any other reason. In this respect the women of the church who come to Bible Study, like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, they have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from them." (Lk 10:38-42).

O Bethany, my Home Sweet Home,
Where my Lord is wont to stay.
Unworthy though as I can be,
He's forgiv'n me by His grace.
What a blessing before Him seated
Who can take away my part?
O Bethany, my Home Sweet Home!
God and man share heart to heart.
My heavy burdens He puts them on Himself;
Through Valley of Tears no more bereft.
For Jesus is my Home Sweet Home,
I must see Him day to day.
His love endures till worlds be gone,
With Him life brings no dismay.
His love endures till worlds be gone,
I'll go with Him all the way.

— Translated from Heavenly People's Choruses.

Why did not Jesus rush to the scene of trouble? Was not Lazarus dying? He need not rush to the scene. He could have uttered a word, as He had done before in healing the nobleman's son at Capernaum (Jn 4:46-54). He did neither. He chose rather to delay His coming. "He abode two days still in the same place where He was" (v 6).

This He did, not because He was afraid like His disciples who were glad in the procrastination. The disciples expressed concern when the Lord finally said, "Let us go into Judea again." (v 7) They argued "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee: and goest Thou thither again?"

Jesus' answer was one of confidence and assurance. Jesus believed in God's timing of events. He was not afraid to meet danger face to face. If His time had not yet come, He would be safe. Therefore Jesus' delay in going to the scene was not due to the danger facing Him.

Jesus' delay, which seemed to result in prayer unanswered, was to the glory of God, "that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." (v 4) Jesus' delay, while giving a little respite to the fearful disciples, serves to reveal what are the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Insofar as Thomas is concerned, he seems to adopt a stoical attitude. He said to his fellowdisciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (v 16).

Jesus' delay, by no means, is unanswered prayer. Not only is it to God's glory, it is for the good of everyone He loves. The conclusion of this episode is summed up in v. 15, "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe" The "ye" in this verse includes "many of the Jews which came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did" of v. 45, i.e. friends of the Bethany Home Sweet Home.

When things don't come our way, don't fret! Sit still like Mary. Don't rush about like Martha. Can you sing this song:

Trust in the Lord and don't despair,

He is a friend so true!

No matter what your troubles are,

Jesus will see you through.

Sing, when the day is bright;

Sing, through the darkest night

Everyday, all the way,

Let us sing, sing, sing!

“Inexperienced Faith, Experienced Faith, Faith that needs no Experience”

This three-step progression of faith, as enunciated by Dr Chia Yu-Ming, China's greatest theologian, may be seen in Martha's quest. Martha has followed our Lord through many of His wonderful deeds. If she had not seen the miracles others had seen she believed them all the same. Believing is seeing!

Surely she had heard how Jesus healed the paralytic of 38 years, how he opened the eyes of the young man born blind by sending him to wash at the Pool of Siloam. And she must have heard of Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain. But now her brother was dead four days. Could Jesus raise him up?

In her brother's case, her faith in the Lord's ability to raise him up was that which Dr. Chia calls inexperienced faith. This is reflected in v. 24, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection in the last day." When Jesus commanded to take away the stone Martha's inexperienced faith is expressed again, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days" (v. 37). Inexperienced faith winces before great odds. Martha had never seen a man dead four days raised to life.

When Jesus cried with a loud voice to raise Lazarus, the same voice also raised up Martha's sinking faith. Now that she had seen with her own eyes, she believed with all the others (v 45). Faith in the Lord's power to raise the dead at the last day was doubly confirmed. Experienced faith!

In the next chapter where the scene portrays a resurrected Lazarus sitting at table with his Lord and Saviour, and a serving Martha, how confident was she now in contrast with that trembling soul that she was before the event. Now she could say with a confidence as never before "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God which shall come into the world (v 27)." Faith that needs no experience!

What we need is experienced faith that will grow to faith that needs no experience. Read the Bible everyday. The Bible is experienced faith that will so strengthen us that our faith will need no experience.

The Economy of Miracles

Remember what happened after the feeding of the five thousand? Jesus told the disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." (Jn 6:12) Here is a vital principle about miracles — the economy of miracles.

Remember also John Sung's quoting of a Beijing Christian saying, "When you have a small sickness, go to the Taifu (doctor); when you have a big sickness, then you must go to Yesu." Here is also enunciated the vital principle of economy in miracles.

That is to say, what we can do, we must do. What we cannot do, Jesus will do. Notice that in the raising of Lazarus, Jesus called out with a loud voice to work the miracle. But He did not tell the Grave-stone to roll away, nor did He command the grave clothes and napkin to fall off with another shout. He told the people concerned to do it themselves.

Today God has given us modern medicine and surgery. Advances are made in every branch of healing, so that T.B. and pneumonia can be cured and eyes can be opened by the surgeon's knife. Not to find treatment from doctors specialised in their skills but to rely on some itinerant faith healer is to misuse God's economy. Not to take two aspirin tablets and thank God for them as you would before meals, but to seek a faith healer for your headache is pious foolishness.

In America there are evangelists who try to handle snakes literally and drink poison to show off their faith. One even tried to resurrect his dead mother because he said Jesus had commanded his disciples to raise the dead. This evangelist prayed and sweated with every ounce of his strength to raise his mother, but to no avail. This is pious foolishness plus foolhardiness.

While we thank God for modern medicine and surgery neither can we neglect earnest prayer. We also believe in faith healing, but such as is of partnership between God and man. The pioneer-missionary working in frontier villages not only prays for the sick but also uses pills and syringes, and his landrover too to transport some injured person to hospital. This is working out the economy of miracles, allowing God to do what we cannot do, and doing what we can do.

Tears of Christian Love

Many Jews came to comfort Martha and Mary concerning their brother. The scene seemed to be a picture of solemn serenity until Jesus arrived. Then all the pent up tears like a torrent gushed out from Mary when she saw Him. This touched off a stream of weeping in the Jews, so much so that the Master also wept. Tears of sympathy. Tears of Love.

There's no power on earth greater than love. Love can melt the hearts of steel which the fire of gunpowder cannot.

In the raising of Lazarus we have learnt not only the lesson of faith. We learn also now the lesson of love, Christian love. The love of a sister for a brother is natural love. The love of a sister-in-Christ for a brother-in-Christ is supernatural love. As the Bethany Trio believe in the Lord, we see a two-fold love in action.

We also see how Mary loves her Lord and how Jesus loves her, one of His blood-bought lambs. Observe what Martha said to Mary the moment she got home after meeting with Jesus on the road. "The Master is come, **and calleth for thee,**" she cried. The same love of the Shepherd for His erring sheep is seen in Mark's account where the angel said to the woman, "But go your way, tell his disciples **and Peter . . .**" (Mark 16:7).

Here's a lesson on how to comfort the bereaved. Not by words but by tears. Tears of Christian love. Thus we have a word from the apostle Paul, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another . . ." (Rom 12:15, 16).

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love,
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.
We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

That God's Son Must Die for their Crimes!

This miracle of miracles so alarmed the power-mad Jewish leaders that a council was immediately called. Said the chief priests and Pharisees among themselves, "What are we accomplishing? Here is this man performing miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation." (NIV).

Calvin comments: "A specious (looks good at first sight) disguise cloaks their wickedness — zeal for public good. Their chief worry and fear was that their tyranny would be destroyed; but they pretend to be anxious about the Temple and its worship of God, about the reputation of their nation and the condition of the people."

Then spoke Caiaphus, high priest of that year, "You know nothing at all! You do not realise that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." The solution to the so-called problem of the Romans coming to take over their authority was to have an innocent man put to death.

When John says that Caiaphus said not this of himself, he means that something greater incited his tongue, because God intended to testify by his mouth something higher than come to mind. Unwittingly he prophesied in his position as high priest that Jesus would die a vicarious death for the nation, and beyond that, for the children of God that were to be gathered from the Gentile world.

Once again, before Jesus' time was up, He retreated from further confrontation with the Jews. He quietly departed to a city called Ephraim in north Judea, close to Samaria. This did not lessen the Jews' determination to kill Him. For while Jesus went into retreat His fame spread abroad the more so that He was the subject of discussion by the crowds now making their way to Jerusalem for the last Passover of His Life.

Chapter XII

By His Death that many might live Jesus Christ is the Seed of Life

In this chapter John takes us into the Holy Week. The hour had come when our Lord must return to Jerusalem and there "suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21).

One of the most touching events prior to His Death was His anointing by Mary of Bethany (Matt. 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). Ryrie's Harmony of the Gospels puts the day of the anointing to be the Sabbath just before Holy Week. A comparative reading of Matthew and Mark shows that the event occurred in the house of Simon the Leper, a neighbour.

The moment it was noised abroad that our Lord had arrived at Bethany, a great crowd of the Jews gathered. Some came with curiosity to see not only Jesus, but also Lazarus, the man who walked out of the grave after four days. Others to watch His steps, how they might kill Jesus, and Lazarus too. That happens in every big congregation! There are the sincere worshippers like the Bethany Trio and Simon. There are the curious. There are the fault-finders and plotters, coming in the spy. These were John Sung's observations.

The next day, that is Palm Sunday, Jesus rode a young donkey ceremonially into Jerusalem. This is now known as the Triumphal Entry. Read Matt. 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 18:29-44 for a composite picture. John mentions among the great multitudes that welcomed Him, King of Jerusalem were those who had seen Him raise Lazarus.

Sometime during Holy Week, it is John who tells us of an interview by certain Greeks through Philip of Bethsaida of Galilee. These Greeks were Gentile-born proselytes, some of whom were settled in Galilee, and perhaps were acquaintances of Philip. (Philip is a Greek name, though he was a Jew). Their request to see Jesus expresses support, an encouragement to our Lord at this crisis hour.

As Jesus spoke to His disciples and these Greeks, He was elated by the fruits that He as the corn of heavenly wheat, the Seed of Life falling into the ground to die, would produce. But as He discoursed He also had a foretaste of Gethsemane, wherefore He sighed, "Now is my soul troubled". In his sombre soliloquy a marvellous thing happened. A voice rang out of heaven, so loud, that some said it thundered. The voice came not so much for our Lord as for the bystanders. Those who heeded that voice were saved, but those who turned a deaf ear were condemned. Those like the Greeks who came to see Jesus in order to hear the Truth were accepted but the unbelieving bystanders were rejected.

As we have noted earlier Bethany was our Lord's House of Rest on His way from upcountry to Jerusalem. As this was Christ's last visit to Bethany, Simon the Leper whom Jesus had obviously healed before this, opened his house to receive him, and the disciples. According to John Sung, it was a job to feed, apart from the Lord, twelve hungry young men. Hence the enlistment of Martha into the Simon kitchen. Lazarus, to show his gratitude to the Lord for raising him, came over to keep company.

While the disciples had eaten their fill, some quite oblivious of approaching storm, our Lord pondered in deep meditation. No body followed His thoughts, but Mary. Nobody knew how heavy a load our Lord was carrying, but Mary. Only Mary had fathomed the innermost feelings of our Lord, because she loved Him dearly. And loving is always expressed by giving. Much loving, much giving. Little loving, little giving (cf. Luke 7:14-43). Mary loved Jesus because she had experienced forgiveness as no other had.

The pound of very precious spikenard ointment, costing 300 pence or **denarii** was equivalent to a year's wages. Mark says Mary first broke the alabaster box before she anointed Him. (Alabaster is a white stone, semi-transparent). Immediately a shot was fired from Judas Iscariot's sniping post. He who rarely spoke a kind word to anybody, least of all to our Lord. What a picture of those members in Church who say bad of others, but it only reveals their own badness. There was no love lost by Judas in the remark, even when he pretended concern for the poor, for John tells us he was a thief. The taking of public funds for one's own use is a serious crime! Criminal breach of trust, to use a legal term.

But Jesus accepted Mary's love offering. Jesus commended her, but rebuked Judas with a retort: "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always" (v. 8). Jesus appreciates our love gifts.

Here's another verse of the Bethany Song translated from Hong Kong Rev John E Su's Heavenly People's Choruses: And our Lord would say to us, as we sing, think of Mary too! Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matt. 26:13).

My Home Sweet Home, by Olivet

Finds grace in Emmanuel's eyes.

Where joined in one are heart and heart.

Then soar our souls to the skies.

I pour on Him my ointment sweet,

Little token of my love.

O Bethany, my Home Sweet Home —

Endless blessings from above.

The Significance of Palm Sunday

While the Jews plotted Jesus's death, Sunday dawned bright and clear! (Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (Jn. 10:9). "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24).

The significance of Jesus riding a young donkey into Jerusalem was not understood by the disciples until Jesus rose from the dead when they remembered the Scriptures that foretold His benign kingship (Zech. 9:9).

The multitudes, wave after wave, rallied their king, palm leaves swinging to the chanting of Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna is another Hebrew compound word which literally means, "Make safe, I pray you". It is now adopted by all languages through the Church. It is an exclamation of praise to God and prayer for blessing.

As Holy Week comes round each year, we have found it an especial blessing to celebrate it, beginning from Palm Sunday. Some churches decorate the occasion with palm fronds, or even make a procession round the church grounds before entering the sanctuary to worship. The celebrating of Palm Sunday subdues us to Christ the King and honours Him with praise. The celebration of Palm Sunday is to prepare the hearts of the devout for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Let's not forget, Christ is not only Saviour, but Lord and **King!** And He is coming soon to earth again as King, not over the Church only, but also over every nation, kindred and tongue.

The singing of Hosanna exalted Christ as King of the Jews. The Pharisees being ever jealous of their high powers resented this more than ever before. Matthew 21:15 says they were "sore displeased". They resolved to turn the Hosannas into "Crucify Him". Before the hour arrived, however, our Lord was kept safe by His Father. The crowds who had witnessed Christ raising Lazarus and who now came in force were a wall of defence around Him. "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look now the whole world has gone after him!'" (NIV). Where do you stand in the crowd?

John 12:20-22

Rejected by the Jews, Welcomed by the Greeks

It is John who lets us into an interview of certain Greeks with the Lord during Holy Week. These were devout Gentiles coming from various countries to attend the Passover feast in Jerusalem. (From Romans 1:16 it appears the word Greeks is taken to mean Gentiles broadly).

Apart from the conjecture they might have come from Galilee, we have concrete examples of their devoutness. Read the story of the good Centurion of Capernaum (Matt 8:5-13). For his great faith and worship of the Lord Jesus he is made a forerunner of many who shall come from the east and west, and shall sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Luke tells us further this Centurion had built a synagogue for the Jews (Luke 7:5).

These Gentile Greeks figure greatly in the Acts of the Apostles as “fearers” or “worshippers of God” — earnest heathen, who turned from idolatry to the Jewish faith in one living and true God (I Thess 1:9). The “Greeks” while not taking part in the ceremonial, nevertheless, joined with worship of the Synagogue and Temple. One of them was Cornelius, a Centurion of the Italian band, a Roman.

Other than these “Greeks”, we can think of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:27) who also came to Jerusalem to the Feast (Acts 8:27).

So when those Greeks asked to see Jesus, they were seeking for the Truth. While the Jews had rejected Him here were Greeks who received Him. These are the other sheep that must be brought into the fold (Jn 10:16). And when Greeks, Romans and Ethiopians are converted to Christ they will sing —

“In Christ there is no east or west,
In Him no south or north,
But one great fellowship of love,
Throughout the whole wide earth”

The Greeks represent the cultured and educated Gentiles. Our ministry must not neglect the educated (Rom 1:14).

The Barbarians, those who speak uncultured dialects, are their counterparts to whom Paul is indebted in the Gospel. Hence the importance of missions to far off islands and heartlands of continents. They are also crying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Do you, like Philip, bring them to Christ?

Glorification through Crucifixion

In answer to the inquiring Greeks Jesus talks of the glorification of the Son. What does this mean? Calvin says this glorification “refers to the proclamation of the Gospel, as if He had said that soon the knowledge of Him would be spread throughout every region of the world”. Ellicott says, “This is to be accomplished in His ascension and return to Heaven. But the immediate connection implies that He regards the extension of His Messianic work, and the acceptance of His truth by the nations of the earth, as part of the glory of the Son of man.”

But the way to this “glorification” is one, only one—the way of the Cross. Jesus once again announces His death, the heavenly corn of wheat falling into the ground of humanity to die. He is optimistic about His death because out of it will come the Resurrection and the bringing in of countless souls as fruits from His death. In v. 25 He exhorts once again the fearful disciples to follow Him to the end. They who will suffer with Him will reign with Him. (v. 26) This theme He has been harping upon ever since Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:21) in order to strengthen His followers.

But Jesus is both God and Man, fully God, fully Man, yet without sin. As Man He has also the weakness of the flesh. “The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt 26:41). Suddenly, a dark cloud from Gethsemane, as it were, overshadowed Him. “Now is my soul troubled, . . . and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” O, the mystery of Godliness and the mystery of humanity united in one Christ. The mystery of human tension in Godliness and the mystery of Godly tension in humanity.

Who can enter into the mystery of those days before Crucifixion? Let us say with Paul, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Phil 3:10). Memorise this verse.

The Father's Final Confirmation

The Father spoke from heaven on Jesus' baptism to tell the world that this was His Son (Matt. 3:17). The Father spoke from heaven again at the Transfiguration of the Son to strengthen the faith of the the three disciples (Matt 17:5). Now the Father spoke the third and final time to tell both the world and His disciples what He would do through His Son. "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes," declared our Lord as the voice subsided.

What was the reaction of the crowd to the Voice from heaven? To most of the crowd it was a rumbling sound, like thunder. "Except a man be born again he cannot **hear** from the Kingdom of God" is our corollary to Jn 3:3. As the Apostle Paul puts it, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The words of the preacher, declaring God's message to the congregation Sunday after Sunday, may be falling on too many deaf ears. Are you one of them?

Some of the crowd said, "An angel spoke to Him." The Voice was from the Father for their sakes, but they thought it to be directed to Jesus by some angelic power. The second class of hearers who see a need in others but never in themselves are not only deaf but blind. When you come to Church you come because there's a special singing item with angelic music (the church today uses entertainment to draw a crowd) or because you want to hear what He will say to you?

When the Father answered, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" to the Son's prayer, "Father glorify thy name." He meant to say, "I will perfect what I have begun" (Calvin). It is our duty to make the glory of God the utmost exertion of our life, if need be, even to death. This is the Son's submission to the Father, who reiterates it in his reference to being "lifted up" i.e. to be hung on the cross to save them that believe. The Father's final confirmation of the Son finds reciprocal submission in the Son. His substitutionary death on the cross is a prerequisite to the Glory to come. And He invites the crowd again to believe in Him by walking in this light of His teaching. And you!

Come to the Light, 'tis shining for thee;
Sweetly the Light has shone upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see:
The Light of the world is Jesus.

The Father's Final Condemnation

When God has spoken, and spoken again, and again, and man rejects him, he is condemned for ever. With multi-audio-visuals, the Voices from heaven and the miracles performed by the Son on earth, alas, the results coming from the audience were scanty. Thus comments John the Evangelist, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him" (v. 37).

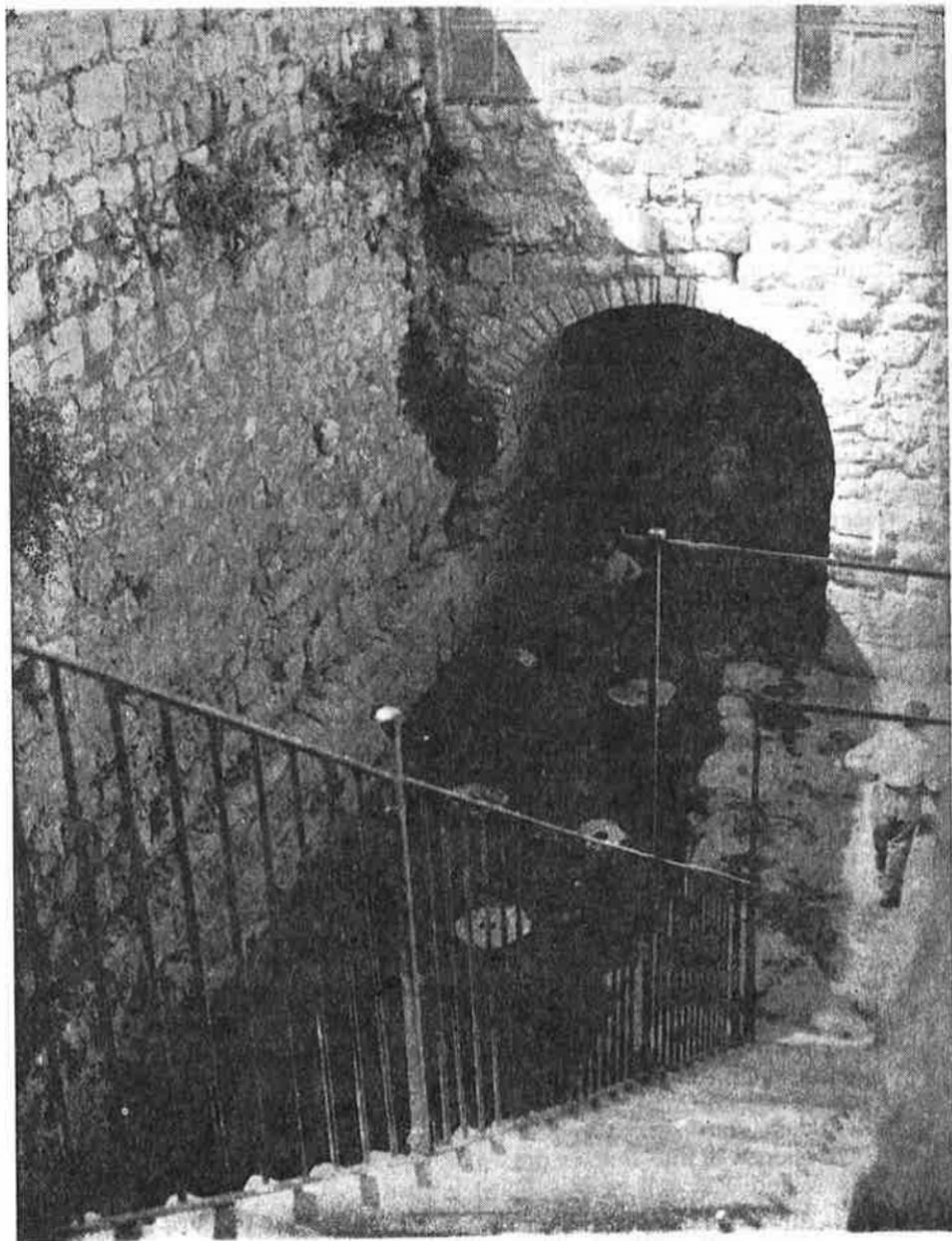
When God's mercies and grace are repeatedly rejected, then His judicial hardening of men's hearts begin. Isaiah's famous words are quoted to prove the point: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart and be converted, and I should heal them" (v. 40). The best example of such rejection we can think of is Pharaoh. Despite the Lord's relief given him after every plague, Pharaoh broke promise after promise to let Israel go. God's grace to a hardened heart, like water oozing over cement, makes it even harder! The Jews who were privileged to see and hear so much from God's only begotten Son became the most hardened lot against the grace of God. This is true also today. The most Christianised nations today, like those in the west, might be called Christian. The fact is they are the least Christian in proportion to the less developed countries who are just beginning to open up to the Gospel. Is that the state of your heart too, you of the third and fourth generation? "The first shall be the last."

But there is always a remnant of believers even among the most hardened. It is satisfying to note that among them, apart from Nicodemus (Jn 7:50) were many of the chief rulers who also secretly believed on Him (Jn 12:42). Are you a secret believer my Jewish reader?

A final warning before Christ concluded this phase of his public ministry, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (v 48). This reflects His previous warning, "For if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (Jn 8:24).

There's a line that is drawn by rejecting our Lord,
Where the call of His Spirit is lost, . . .

And you hurry along with the pleasure-mad throng
Have you counted, have you counted the cost?



Steps leading down to the Pool of Siloam. (John 9:7).

Chapter XIII

To the Disciples already Cleansed Jesus Christ remains their Ablution of Life.

It is important to note that the events of Holy Week, the last days of our Lord's life on earth, occupy a sizeable portion of each of the Four Gospels. John devotes practically half of his book to those acts and words of Jesus not found in the other Gospels.

John Ch. 13 is a case in point. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels tell us more or less the same about the institution of the Lord's Supper, it is John who supplements with this vivid and detailed account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

If at all washing the feet is a courtesy to be observed on such an occasion as the keeping of the Passover in Mark's mother's Upper Room, it is the disciples who should wash the Master's feet. Instead, they were like a bunch of naughty children, vying with one another who should be No. 1 (Matt 22:24-27). To make it worse, it was at the Lord's Table that the dark intentions of the Traitor Judas Iscariot were conceived. Hence the hint "and ye are clean, but not all." For He knew who should betray Him. Therefore He said, "Ye are not all clean." Washing their feet Jesus would teach them the much needed lesson of humility and loyalty. "Proud man," says St. Augustine, "would perish unless a lowly God found him." So let us learn this lesson too, and wash one another's feet in mutual esteem and forgiveness, in loyal service of the Master.

Some Christian sects practise foot-washing literally like the Seventh Day Adventists. The Pope would go around washing the feet of twelve laymen during Holy Week. A holy ceremony they observe because they take Jesus' words literally. We do not practise foot-washing because we take the object lesson rather to heart. Nor dare we tread the way of the cross, in holy service of the Master, without first having our feet washed. Let us not be as "fools rushing in where angels fear to tread." Holiness of life and loyalty of service are both so lacking in the Church today. How do you stand up to the divine measurement set by our Lord as He stoops to wash your feet?

John 13:1

What love!

There is a Chinese saying: "Before a man dies, his words are kind." His attitude to his fellowmen is suddenly orientated to goodness. How much more the spirit of our Lord. One who is sent from God on a Mission to save a lost world. One sent to die our death, once for all, that we might be delivered from death and live forever more!

In order to spread the good news of His saving grace to a dying mankind, He had chosen twelve disciples, and trained them three-and-a-half years. He ate and slept and walked with them as He preached and taught throughout the land of Judea. What comradeship, what bond of fraternal kindness that bound Master and pupils had developed and deepened through the years. That ineffable brotherly love, "passing the love of women," only David could express from unfathomable depths on the death of Jonathan (II Sam 1:26). This is re-stated by John the beloved disciple in respect of his Lord in the last hours of His earthly life: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Jn. 13:1). Dr David Smith tries to describe it thus: "unto the utmost—loved them as He had never done before. It was the tenderness of parting; and His heart was full to overflowing when they gathered that night for the last time in the Upper Room. At the very outset His tenderness was sorely tried. St. Luke has told (22:24-30) how a contention arose among the Twelve which of them should be accounted the greatest; and here St John shows its occasion."

Applying Christ's tender love for the disciples to us who seem far from Him, Calvin says, "Let us know that He is mindful of us, for He loves His own who are in the world. He still bears the same attitude now which He had at the crisis of His death." Thus, when you feel lonely, deserted, despised, remember this, that He whose love for us is stronger than death will deliver you to the very end.

Days are filled with sorrow and care,
Hearts are lonely and drear;
Burdens are lifted at Calvary,
Jesus is very near.

What Magnanimity !

V. 2 and v. 3 should give us an insight into the divine magnanimity of Jesus Christ. What human leader could tolerate any traitor upon discovery of his plot? V. 2 tells us that Judas Iscariot had not conceived to betray his Lord until this moment, when supper was ended. He who looks into every heart, and not on the outward appearance, perceived the sinister design without casting a glance. Did not our Saviour hint of his fateful hour when he spoke at the end of the great discourse on the Bread of Life, "Have not I chose you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was who should betray him, being one of the twelve." (Jn 6:70, 71).

Inspite of the rising rebellion in Judas, Jesus remained calm and resolved to wash the disciples' feet, including the traitor's. The assurance from the Father of the universal authority conferred on Him and the self-consciousness of His Divine origin and return to God secured Him from the least perturbation.

If ever there was a human that could approach but a fraction of His composure, it would be His ancestor David, the great King David. How he ruled Israel! in royal serenity amidst the intrigues of Joabs and Ahithophels. Can we learn a lesson from our Lord's magnanimity and go the second mile with evil men? Even when it seems to be a hopeless end? How true the saying by the English poet. "To err is human; to forgive divine."

Read carefully Ps 41 and discover for yourself the many nuances of psychology that come into play in David's life among friends and foes in His kingdom. Learn from him and our Lord how to detect traitors. But never be a traitor yourself. In codified human law treachery against the king is listed the No. 1 crime. Treachery against the Divine King is surely an unpardonable sin inasmuch as it ends in one's own condemnation by suicide.

O the magnanimous magnanimity of our Divine Lord!

The Dual Significance of the Feet-Washing

“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (v. 7) What Jesus did at the moment confounded His disciples, for as we have earlier observed, the washing of feet was what the disciples should have done for their Lord in the beginning.

As we look at the sacred event from a distance, we can see more clearly its significance:

- 1) The disciples who had come to trust the Saviour were washed already, save their feet. This signified their contamination with the world in their daily walk. We need to come to Jesus for cleansing from such contamination as the rivalry for first place even as we come to the Lord’s Table. Jealousy, pride, suspicion, backbiting are sins of the spirit, more deadly than the lusts of the flesh.
- 2) The disciples as a college of trusted lieutenants had now been jolted into disarray by such a turncoat as Judas Iscariot. Hence they were not clean. We must guard always the rank and file of the Lord’s army that there be no defection. How? By washing one another’s feet.

We should wash one another’s feet if the Master has condescended to wash His disciples’ feet. We must come to terms with one another in the service of the Church. For any Session member to speak evil of the Pastor, for any Christian to malign his Church, without any just cause is treachery. Let us never become disloyal to those with whom we labour in the Kingdom of God.

Simon Peter, though not understanding the full significance of Jesus’ word, was nevertheless right when he said, “Not my feet only, but my hands and my head.” Let us add, “My heart, and my bowels.” Have you been washed by the Blood of the Lamb?

His power can make you what you ought to be!
His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free;
His love can fill your soul and you will be,
’Twas best for Him to have His way with thee.

The Treachery of Judas Foreshadowed in David's Life.

King David, the ancestor of Jesus Christ, in many ways portrayed his Greater Son. As our Lord is here being betrayed by Judas, Jesus' treasurer and one of the Twelve, so was David betrayed by his closest friend and counsellor, Ahithophel.

Did you read Psalm 41? Do you realise v. 18, "... but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" refers to Ps. 41:9? As David complains to God in this Psalm about his enemies, he evidently cites the case of Ahithophel at this verse. (Matthew Henry).

Who is Ahithophel? He is to David as Kissinger was to President Nixon. II Sam 16:23 says of Ahithophel, "And the counsel of Ahithophel which he counselled in those days, was as if a man inquired at the oracle of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom."

When Absalom rebelled against his father David, Ahithophel sided with the rebellious son. "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." What anguish of soul, as David found himself stabbed, as it were, in the back! What anguish of soul in our Lord too as we now re-read Jn 13:21.

How can it be that a disciple should betray his Master? This dark mystery is hinted in v. 16. When a disciple tries to become "greater" than his Master. When his will rises above the will of his Lord. How do you react to your superior's instructions? How do you work with your boss? In the Church, how do you go about the Lord's business with your pastor, elder, superintendent, senior? This is one question often asked confidentially to a Referee of one seeking employment with an establishment. Insurbordination leads to treachery! Don't be an Ahithophel. Don't be a Judas! "The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." (v. 16).

In Ps. 55 David speaks further of the traitor: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me: then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and my acquaintance.... The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." (v. 12, 13, 21).

Jesus stoops lower to conquer yet

The magnanimous magnanimity of Jesus is magnified further when, after washing all the disciples' feet, including the Traitor's, He gave a sop to Judas. A piece of bread dipped in the "sauce" (a paste of dried fruits crushed and moistened with vinegar). It was an ancient custom to show special kindness when a host gave to a guest a portion (cf. I Sam 9:23, 24), like his Chinese counterpart airlifting a chunk of meat with his chopsticks to his friend. Thus when our Lord gave the sop to Judas, it was His final act of magnanimity. Jesus stoops lower to conquer yet.

Dr David Smith comments, "He told the traitor that he was still dear to His heart, and would he even now repent, all would be forgiven. But alas! The appeal was unavailing. Judas accepted the token of love from the Master's hand unmoved, and thereby sealed his doom. It happened with him as with that miserable mortal, Francis Spira, when He stifled the Holy Spirit's pleading and signed his recantation. 'I felt, he afterwards confessed,' a wound in my will that I have never got over since; my will has never been itself since that fatal morning; it is paralysed at the heart.' And even so it befell the traitor when he thus did despite unto the Spirit of grace. His soul was blasted." This is what is meant by John when he recorded: After the sop, then entered Satan into him.

He who is afraid to die has died a hundred times! He who is prepared to die, and allows himself to be betrayed to death, can never die! This is the victory of Him who stoops lower yet to conquer. Hence His glorification, and through His glorification the Father is glorified too. In the willing death of Christ on the cross, a wonderful change of things was wrought, says Calvin: "The condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men, in short the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order... Christ concludes that He will win a glorious triumph by His death, because His sole aim in it is to glorify the Father." Hallelujah for the cross! But let us all learn from our crucified Saviour to be magnanimous even to our foes.

Cocksure Peter

There's a Chinese saying, "As distance measures the power of a horse, so long associations between friends reveal the heart." We have tasted the gall of bitterness in Judas' character as revealed by his treachery of the Master at the Last Supper. Now we shall see the cocksureness of Peter, the centre-forward of the remaining Eleven, pruned. Are you a Peter?

Let us go back to the beginning: "...when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end." (13:1) With Judas now gone into the night, Jesus all the more expressed His tender affections to the rest. But His greater concern for them was their welfare after He was gone, that they love one another

Now as Christ cared lovingly the future of His disciples, Peter rose to the occasion to express his devotion in the Master's impending danger. He sensed, as they all sensed, that their Lord was coming to the hour of crisis, the hour of arrest and death. In a moment of noble resolution he offered to die together with the Master. Is that not the experience of us who are more emotionally charged? Don't be too cocksure! As Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before that cock-a-doodle note, so must we be warned against cocksureness.

I have known of an elder who loved his Lord dearly and was outspoken for His cause in peacetime. During the Japanese occupation of Singapore this elder was one day searched as he walked past a Japanese sentry. Gospel tracts were found on his person. When questioned if he was a Christian he vociferously denied he was one. Peter, beware of cocksureness!

Chapter XIV

To Thomas and You Who Grope for Salvation, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life

As night had descended and zero hour was approaching, the disciples (minus Judas) were beset with a mounting anxiety. To allay their fears our Lord comforted them with this sermon in the passover chamber.

Though He was soon to take leave of His disciples, He would not leave them comfortless like wandering orphans. He was going back to His Father and would return to receive them to a better abode He would prepare for them. In this sermon Jesus leads them to higher planes of truth, with many applications for their edification and ours.

- 1) His Second Coming
- 2) His being the only way to God
- 3) His oneness with the Father
- 4) His sending of the Holy Spirit
- 5) His peace that transcends the world
- 6) His subordination to the Father

Oftentimes we hear John 14:1-6 read at funeral services for the consolation of bereaved families. We hear it so much that we almost know it by heart. Let us pay more attention to the remaining portion of this chapter.

Usually, it is Peter who stands up to speak or ask questions. Having just been told how he would thrice deny his Lord in the ensuing encounter with the enemy, Peter is ominously silent.

Can you identify the three disciples who speak this time? Who is Judas, not Iscariot? He is the author of the Epistle of Jude, also called Thaddaeus and Lebbaeus in Matthew 10:3.

1. His Second Coming

By telling the disciples of His second coming, Jesus gives them what the Church calls the Blessed Hope. Jesus is the only way to God, but it is not a one way street for Himself to go home to the Father forever. It is a two way street, whereby He will return to take us to Himself. That is why He begins with "Let not your heart be troubled."

The classic chapter describing the manner of His return is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Jesus' second coming will not be the same as His first coming. It will not be in a lowly manger but with loud fanfare of trumpet-sounding angels, in super-atomic power and celestial glory visible in the clouds to the whole earth.

At the second coming the dead in Christ will be raised with new, glorified bodies. They will be whisked up to heaven with those Christians alive after them in a lightning Rapture or Catching-up. Such a cataclysmic event of comic proportions defies every imagination.

Some Christians, studying Revelation and other prophetic Scripture on the end-times, argue much about the timing of the Rapture. This is like going to take a train armed only with time-tables. Jesus does not stress on the timing of His Second Coming, but rather our preparedness to meet Him. Those who have His truth and His life will go with Him who is the way. Thomas' question from a heart of inexperienced faith leads us all who reads this chapter and believe Him into a faith that needs no experience. If we trust the Lord, He will take us back to be with Him. He is our guide to show the way. Can you say you will go with Him at His Second Coming? Or, should He tarry longer, to meet Him when you die? If He does not come to us yet, we must be prepared to go to Him! Are you ready?

2. The One and Only Way to God

Though we have covered up to verse 6 in the previous lesson, we must give special attention to this one verse, for it touches on a very important aspect of truth. Note that Jesus says, "... no man cometh unto the Father **but** by me." No man can go to heaven except through Jesus Christ. How different is Jesus' assertion from the philosophy of the world.

This means the Roman Catholic doctrine of making Mary a co-Saviour is a great lie, though they acknowledge Christ died for our sins. Are you a Roman Catholic? You are taught a wrong doctrine.

This means every human religion, east or west, is of no avail to save us. There's one religion that substitutes with a man for a mediator to God. He is out! Because without the Son, there is no way to the Father. Thus we must pray in Jesus' name. "... for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

The Jews who stick only to Moses and the 39 books of the Old Testament are also out. They will be saved as a nation when they worship Jesus as their Messiah at His Second Coming (read Zechariah 12:10).

Much less can those who follow Confucius, who doesn't know of life beyond the grave. Much less the followers of Buddha or Laotse. What a pity to see our own countrymen worshipping idols and devils and a host of gods and goddesses; Kwan Yin and Kwan Kong. Heroines and heroes they might be, but those we have named above, including prophets, could not save themselves to live again. How then can they save us?

Some who say, "As long as we have faith", without reference to Jesus, are lost, like a ship without anchor or rudder in a stormy sea. **Jesus is the one and only way to God!** This is what we must tell to others who do not know Him. Do you? Rev. C.T. Hsu, a founder member of the B-P Church now in New York tells the world that "ONLY JESUS SAVES" by wearing this label on his jacket wherever he goes! This has provoked many a debate with Roman Catholics, for good!

3. Jesus and the Father are One

The doctrine of the Son's equality with the Father has been enunciated to the Jews on several occasions when Jesus' authority was challenged. (Review your earlier lessons in John). Philip knows something about this, but is not clear, so he wants to know more (v. 8). So it must have been with the other disciples, and with us.

Jesus and the Father are one because He is the only begotten Son of God. John 1:1 and 2, in introducing us to the True God against the false ones and idols, declares: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." In these statements we are introduced to the mystery of the eternal Godhead: To the unity of God, and to the Trinity of God, Jesus the Son being the Second Person and the Comforter of v. 16, the Third Person.

Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His Person (Hebrews 1:3) so that it is true to say that when we see Him we see the Father. Is that not our experience when we see some son who looks and speaks and acts so similar to his father? Jesus is one with the Father in substance (essence), power and glory (Shorter Catechism A.6). Proof that Jesus is God: His miracles (Works). Read v. 10, 11.

A most comforting thought is that the disciples, who would be Jesus' hands and feet when the Head is ascended on high, were promised power to do the works of God like the Son, even more! Here in v. 12-15 Jesus hints of the Pentecostal power to come upon the Church. By faith, we can do the same today! "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." (v. 14).

4. The Sending of the Holy Spirit

As our Lord has hinted of the power to be unleashed upon His disciples, He now reveals more fully the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, through Whom His power will be given. The Holy Ghost (old English) or Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, or Counsellor in another translation. The Greek word is **Paracletos** which literally means One called to one's side, or Advocate (1 John 2:1). The Holy Spirit as a Divine Person is here more clearly revealed than in the Old Testament.

In the history of redemption, there is a progressive revelation of God's gracious outworkings in three dispensations. 1) In the Old Testament, God is presented as "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity." 2) In the New Testament God is seen through His only begotten Son. 3) With the return of our Lord to heaven, "another Comforter" was sent in His room, and He it is that continues to this day the ministry of the incarnate Saviour, by wooing sinners to Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit that causes us to be born again by bringing us to the crucified and risen Saviour. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals the Truth of Scripture to us after we're born again. The Holy Spirit brings us not only to the Son but also to the Father (v. 20). Romans 8:14, 15: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." If you have the Spirit of God in you, you can see things that the natural man cannot see, the spiritual and heavenly truths which are foolishness to the world (1 Corinthians 2).

In v. 26 Jesus says the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things and bring to remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Calvin comments that we need patience to learn the things of Christ until the Spirit makes plain what we seemed to have often read or heard in vain. Outward preaching will be useless unless the teaching of the Spirit is added to it. This should supplement what Christ says to Judas (not Iscariot) under what condition God will manifest Himself to man — when we love Him and keep His commandments. (v. 21).

5. Peace that transcends the world (v. 27)

Memorise the golden text of this verse, for we so much need peace in this troubled world!

Bishop J.C. Ryle comments: 'Peace is Christ's peculiar gift; not money, not worldly ease, not temporal prosperity. These are at best very questionable possessions. They often do more harm than good to the soul. They act as clogs and weights to our spiritual life. Inward peace of conscience, arising from a sense of pardoned sin and reconciliation with God, is a far greater blessing. This peace is the property of all believers, whether high or low, rich or poor.'

The peace which Christ gives He calls "my peace". It is specially His own to give, because He bought it by His own blood, purchased it by His own substitution, and is appointed by the Father to dispense it to a perishing world. Just as Joseph was sealed and commissioned to give corn to the starving Egyptians, so is Christ specially commissioned, in the counsels of the Eternal Trinity, to give peace to mankind.

The peace that Christ gives is not given as the world gives. What He gives the world cannot give at all, and what He gives is given neither unwillingly, nor sparingly, nor for a little time. Christ is far more willing to give than the world is to receive. What He gives He gives to all eternity, and never takes away. He is ready to give abundantly above all that we can ask or think. "Open thy mouth wide," He says, "and I will fill it." (Psalm 81:10).

Peace that overcomes Satan (v. 30)

"For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." J.C. Ryle further comments: Our Lord would have his disciples know that Satan, "the prince of this world," was about to make his last and most violent attack on Him. He was mustering all his strength for one more tremendous onset. He was coming up with his utmost malice to try the second Adam in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross of Calvary. But our blessed Master declares, "He hath nothing in Me." — "There is nothing he can lay hold on. There is no weak and defective point in Me. I have kept my Father's commandment, and finished the work He gave me to do. Satan, therefore, cannot overthrow Me. He can lay nothing to my charge. He cannot condemn Me. I shall come forth from the trial more than conquerer."

6. His subordination to the Father

“For my Father is greater than I” is one favourite sentence the Jehovah Witnesses have plucked out of context that our Lord is a lesser God. The Jehovah Witnesses, like the Arians of the 4th Century, refute Christ’s equality with the Father in substance, or essence. While Jesus admits his subordination to the Father at this point, does He not elsewhere declare Himself equal to the Father? Remember how the Jews sought to kill our Lord “because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself **equal** with God.” (Jn 5:18). In John 10:33 Jesus declares, “I and the Father are one.” For which the Jews took up stones again to stone him, v. 33: “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy: and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” The classic passage on Jesus equality with the Father yet in subordination is penned by the apostle Paul in Phil 2:6-8, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

What then does it mean when Jesus says “My Father is greater than I?” Dr. Buswell says, “It is of the utmost importance that we distinguish between economic and functional subordination and essential equality. When Jesus said, “The Father is greater than I” and “I can of my own self do nothing” (Jn 5:30) we must understand these statements as referring to this economic subordination “in the days of his flesh.” Christ is like a crown prince who becomes a private in the army of which one day he will be Commander-in-chief. This he does on purpose to fulfill the requirement of national service.

Says Dr David Smith, “He was less than the Father in His state of humiliation, forasmuch as for us men and for our redemption, He had become man, laying aside his proper glory”

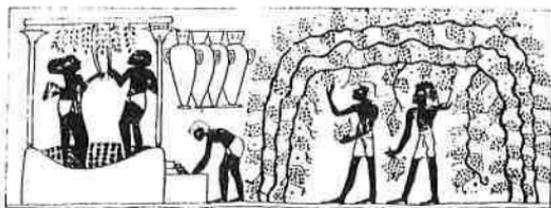
Chapter XV

To infuse us for more fruitful service, Jesus Christ is the Vine of Life

If you read again the last sentence of the last verse of the last chapter, it will give you the clue to the place and setting of this sermon. It is no more in the Passover chamber, but as suggested by Scofield, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane — outside Jerusalem across the Cedron Valley, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus uses the figure of the vine to teach the vital relationship between Himself and the Church, inasmuch as the fruit of the vine, grape juice, was a little while ago used for the Lord's supper. The grape is one of the seven holy fruits (Deut. 8:8), a native of the Holy Land like the olive and the fig. These three fruits are used as symbols of Israel. Where are figures of the other two found? Israel is called the Lord's vineyard and Judah (chief tribe of Israel from which came our Lord) is called the choicest vine (Isa. 5:1-7). Ps. 80 similarly likens God's people of old to a vine brought out of Egypt. It is therefore most appropriate for our Lord to use the figure of the vine for Himself and the Christian Church in an extended sense.

Now, while the vine is a familiar figure to the Jews, to us who live in a land where rather the rambutan grows, it needs some explanation: The common grape vine, says the New Bible Dictionary, is a slender plant which trails on the ground or climbs supports by means of tendrils. When the fruit bearing branches develop they are raised above the ground on supports to a height not much higher than a man. Other Scriptures where the vine is mentioned are Luke 13:6-9; Matt 20:1-6; Mk 9:17; Mt 21:28-32; Mt 21:33; Mk 12:1-11; Lk 20:9-18.



The Church is a Fruitful Vine

Remember this chapter is one of the last sermons our Lord preached to the disciples before He was taken. Though He will be taken physically from earth, He must continue on earth through His Church. His Church must be established and spread to the ends of the earth.

His Father, Almighty God, is the busbandman, or farmer, of the vineyard, which is the world. Jesus is the vine planted of the Father. The true vine, because He is the perfect ideal, the spiritual vine that remains forever. We are His branches, His hands and feet on earth, while the Head is ascended to heaven, to carry out His mission. Our purpose while on earth is to be productive for Him, to bear **much fruit**, to increase His Church. This is illustrated by the heavy, drooping clusters of grapes, sparkling and luscious, ripening on the vine. And as you pluck them to eat, so juicy-sweet in the mouth, won't you say thank you to your host who invites you to his garden? Bear much fruit, our Lord says, that my Father be glorified! Reader, you may have been saved for some years, for a decade, two decades, a lifetime that is about to end! Examine yourself. What fruit have you borne to Christ that has glorified the Father? Or no fruit, as is hinted by our Lord? Or sour fruit, a sour Christian life, whereby you are at odds with other Christians? Not only non-productive, but counter-productive?

A withered branch, falling off painlessly, is taken away to burn. A Christian in name, not ever born again, drops out of Church with no regrets, and drifts back into the world. He fails to qualify in the eyes of the Heavenly Father. Such a person is not saved. How many a Christian in name ends miserably in hell, as John Sung says of the Rich Man in Luke 16. As the Church is a fruitful vine, so may every member produce good fruit to His Lord.

The Process of Increasing Productivity

1. Keep close to the Lord. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Do you seek the Lord's glory in all you do? Do you pray for His approval and guidance? Do you love Him with all your heart? Do you come to church service and prayer meeting and regularly partake of the Lord's Supper? Are you even baptised? These are means of grace whereby we are helped to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Allow His Word through daily Bible reading to purify your life. "Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you." The Bible is likened by St. Paul to water with a cleansing power. He says, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:26). Hence the great effort made in these RPG notes to stimulate Daily Bible reading for the health of your thought life.

3. Endure the corrective measures God has taken to shape your life. A dead branch is broken off without pain, because it has no feeling. A Christian in name leaves the Church without regrets for the world because he has never been a part of the Church. These facts were observed in the last lesson. But a true son and daughter of God must endure chastisement (Heb 12: 6-8). The persecutions that descended on the apostles in the beginning were permitted of God to strengthen the Church. The judgement on Ananias and Sapphira purged the early church of dishonesty and vain glory. When we get sick or sustain loss of property or meet with any kind of failure, remember these have come from our Father to draw us back to Himself. These are prunings for a more productive life.

And in all these developments in the process of increasing our productivity, the sustaining spirit must be love. We continue in His love, to keep His commandments, to be cleansed by His word, to be purged of the Father!

Jesus gives not only Peace But Joy

In Jn 14:27 Jesus bequeaths to His Church peace, **shalom** in Hebrew and Ping An in Chinese. The meaning of joy from God is well expounded by J.C. Ryle as follows:

The joy thought of is that which Christ Himself possessed in the consciousness of His love towards the Father and of the Father's love towards Him. The brightness of that joy lit up the darkest hours of His own human life, and He wills that it should light up theirs. In the consciousness of their love to God and of God's love to them, there would be in them, a part of their true life, joy which no sorrow could overcome. They were as men with troubled hearts. He has told them of the true source of peace. His own peace He has given them. He tells them now of the source of joy, and has spoken the word that they may possess the very joy which was the light of His own heart.

The state of which He has spoken to them—the loving and being loved of God—is the ideal perfection in life. It supplies satisfaction for all the deepest desires of our being. The capacities of the whole man are filled in it, and the result is fulness of joy. They have learnt little of the true spirit of Christianity whose religion does not impart to them a joy which sheds its light over the whole of their lives.

As I have observed, the Christian joy, derived from God's love, is seen to glow above many a troubled Christian forehead. And that joy brings also confidence, so a Christian "with Christ in the vessel can smile at the storm." This is the Protestant faith, not the Roman Catholic religion!

Hitherto, the lowliness of discipleship has been stressed, the prerequisites of obedience and submission. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord" (Matt 10:24). And John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord." These virtues of humble service having been learnt during the last three-and-a-half years, the Eleven (Judas the traitor is gone) are now elevated to friends. "Henceforth I call you not servants, . . . for the servants knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15). The way to the top in God's service is to start from the lowest rung of the ladder, one step at a time, one step at time! Calvin says the first, second and third rule in learning the things of God are humility, humility and humility.

What an honour to be promoted friends of the Lord. Wasn't that the high title given Abraham, the friend of God? (Jas. 2:23; II Chron. 2:7; Isa 41:8). A servant receives only orders from the Master. A friend is in mutual consultation! But let's not forget the rules of loyalty and fidelity and of loving submission that govern friendship (v 12-14).

From the honour of friendship conferred on the disciples our Lord leads them further to their higher appointment, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you, and ordained you . . ." (v. 16). This brings us to the doctrine of election.

When He says that they had not chosen Him, it means they had no credit or merit to qualify as disciples or friends. It was by God's sheer pleasure and purpose and for His own glory that He had chosen the Eleven to be apostles. This was a higher election above their initial election to salvation. The apostles were specially chosen out of the saved ones, entirely by God's special grace. In so revealing to the disciples their higher appointment, Christ's design is to stir up the disciples to do their duty actively (Calvin). This also gives them an undergirding strength for service, as they realise that it is God who works in them "to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

Are you called to be a servant, a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ? In fulltime service? Have there been moments of doubt and discouragement to your soul when the work takes you uphill, along a crooked path? The Way of the Cross! Remember you are chosen specially of God to the task He has called you. Therefore you cannot fail, and must not fail, because Christ is the main spring of your work. Let that inferiority complex be dispelled by His Higher Appointment.

Double Reinforcement for Stormy Days

“Reinforced concrete” is a term often used in the building industry. Webster defines it as “concrete masonry in which steel bars or mesh are so embedded that the two materials act together in resisting forces.”

Before our Lord left His own He must see to their utmost preparation to meet with stormy days ahead. Are we prepared?

In the previous sections we have seen how our Lord has reinforced the disciples by inculcating love — love for the Master, love for one another. When we stand united in the bonds of Christian love we can face a hostile world.

Yes, the hostile world is what the disciples will be launched into. They will be met with hatred (v. 18), persecution (v. 20), prejudice (v. 25). These are the forces facing every true disciple, for every true disciple must undergo what the Master undergoes. Our Saviour in witnessing to the Truth ended in death. So death, martyrdom, is the end expected of every true disciple in a hostile world.

Are we prepared to carry the cross in these last days?

To doubly reinforce the disciples to stand in an evil day, our Lord reminds them of oppositions that will arise for His sake. “But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake . . . he that hateth me hateth my Father also” So, for the Father’s sake too. The realisation of a Christian, when persecuted for righteousness’ sake, that such persecution will be turned into blessing (Matt 5:10) reinforces him to go through the ordeal.

So, speaking from his own experiences, Peter exhorts the persecuted, “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ; happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified . . . Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on His behalf” (I Pet 4:13-16).

Double reinforcement for stormy days consists of love, and devotion to suffer for Jesus’ sake, like the concrete and steel used in building houses.

Christ convicts, the Comforter Convinces

Christ had taught the gracious doctrines of the Truth especially to the Jews. To prove that His teachings were from God, He performed mighty miracles before them, "the works which none other man did." How privileged the Jews were, who were given sumptuous spiritual feasts, course after course. Instead of being grateful for Christ's ministry, the Jews, like spoilt children, spurned the one who fed them. In so doing, they condemned themselves. They were convicted by their rejection of truth. They had no cloke, no excuse, for their sin.

They fulfilled the words of David, who spoke as a type of Him, and was hated without a cause by the men of his generation. Judases not only within, but also without, a great many of them.

But God would not let sinners go without the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus encourages the disciples that He will send the Comforter proceeding from the Father, to further testify of Him. The work of the Holy Spirit is to give success to the Gospel. He will work in the hearts of stubborn men to convince them that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Matthew Henry says, "The blessed Spirit is the Emanation of the Diving Light, and the Energy of Divine power. The rays of the sun, by which it dispenses and diffuses light, heat and influence proceed from the sun, yet are one with it. They (the disciples) also, taught and encouraged by His influences, would bear testimony to Him and His salvation. They would be especially competent in this, having been with Him from the beginning of His ministry."

When Christ is rejected by our initial testimony, the Holy Spirit must work to convince them who reject Christ in order to become those who receive Him. Is that not the experience of those of us who were very stubborn in the beginning? That we have now received Christ is the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter XVI

John 16

Jesus' Parting Words to His Disciples

One reason why Winston Churchill could rally an unprepared nation to resist the Germans to victory in the last War was his frankness. Contrary to Neville Chamberlain's mincing of words, Churchill told the nations the seriousness of the ordeal facing them in no uncertain terms.

He who is the Truth, in his parting words, tells the disciples all the trials that will now break upon their heads like a thunderstorm. Thus Ch. 16 begins abruptly, but truthfully: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea the time cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service (fanaticism of a Jewish jihad).

Jesus then bolsters His argument for leaving them with the good results that will come — the sending of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to take His place — in a greater way (v. 7)! On one hand the Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgement, on the other He will guide the apostles into all truth, since they cannot receive all of it now.

Jesus allays their sorrows and their fears with the assurance of victory over death. Their sorrow would be for "a little while" when it will be turned to joy (v. 20). Our Lord compares his ordeal to a woman in labour, "but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (v. 21).

Furthermore our Lord promises them the security of being supplied by the loving Father above, if they will but ask in His Name.

Strengthened by our Lord's plain speaking, the disciples express their restored confidence (v. 29, 30).

Jesus says for the last time how the disciples will be dispersed by the coming trials, but He will stand the test because the Father is with Him. Memorise v. 33 and test your memory of Jn 14:27 which speaks of the peace that the world so sorely needs.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed

When Jesus first called the 12 apostles, did He not lay down the terms of discipleship? Yes, He did. Though Mark and Luke give us a scanty description, Matthew fills in the details with the whole of chapter 10, consisting of 42 verses. The warnings He gave therein are the same as given in this passage, just as frank and drastic, and the demands of discipleship just as absolute.

In Matthew, however, the disciples are assured of the Father's protection by His particular providential care. They are promised the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for their lips to deliver them from the verbal snares of their accusers. Why does our Lord say, "And these things I said not in the beginning, because I was with you?"

Our understanding is that though He had stated the terms of discipleship, He did not harp on them, since the time of testing had not yet come. Since the Lord was always in the company of the disciples, they felt secure.

Now that zero hour was approaching, the Master must have His disciples braced for the test. To be forewarned is to be forearmed: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy." Suffering no doubt, but deliverance sure!

What lesson can we learn from this plain talk? We must also be alerted. As the disciples had to go through suffering in the way of the cross, we must be prepared to go through turmoil and persecution in these last days before we see the crown — His return! Despite our present trials, however, we also shall have our sorrow turned into joy when He comes in the clouds of heaven to take us up. Is this your hope in a troubled world?

God's Economy, Our Prosperity

As our Lord makes plain the ordeal both Master and disciples must pass, and shows how He must return to His Father in heaven, a pall of silent sorrow falls over the Eleven. As the Chinese saying goes, what greater sorrow is there than to part with a loved one, in life or in death? Naturally the disciples do not want their Lord to leave as little children cannot endure to see their parents go from them for any length of time. Were you Philip or Thomas, how would you have felt?

In the Divine economy of working out the Salvation Plan, however, it is for our good that the Saviour leave this earth. Were He to remain on earth, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, would not be sent. But when our Lord goes up to Heaven according to the economical working out of God's Salvation Plan, the Holy Spirit will descend and carry out what remains to be done. In this arrangement we, the church on earth, will be universally blessed. Whereas our Saviour's work was confined to the land of the Jews, the work of the Holy Spirit will spread to all the world.

Perhaps an illustration at this point will help. How do you light up your house? By putting your lights as near to the ground as you can? If you do this little light is given to the house. No. You put them as high as you can, fixing them usually on the ceiling. Then light comes to every corner of your dwelling. As Christ is gone on high so will His Light the Holy Spirit be shed abroad in our hearts to the ends of the earth. God's economy is our prosperity!

The Spirit's Threefold Mission

1. He will reprove the world of sin. "Of sin because they believe not on Me" (v. 9). To reprove is to convince. It is the Holy Spirit's work to convince, and He can do it effectually. Unless the Holy Spirit accompanies our preaching it will fall on deaf ears. Who are they whom the Holy Spirit will reprove? The world, both Jews and Gentiles. Matthew Henry adds, "Some in every age, in every place, in order to their conversion to faith of Christ. Now this was encouragement to the disciples in reference to the difficulties they were to meet with. Even the malignant earth the Spirit shall work upon; and the conviction of sinners is the comfort of faithful ministers." What sin? The sin of unbelief. To reject Christ is a terrible sin!

2. Of righteousness. He will convince the world that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ the righteous, though the Jews cannot accept this, and therefore they are in much trouble today. Christ is proved to be a Righteous Man and not a deceiver, yea even the Redeemer of mankind.

3. Of judgement. By the judgement of the prince of the world, the Devil, Christ is proved the stronger One. The Spirit will show that Christ's errand into the world was to introduce times of reformation and regeneration. And further of the final day of judgement: all the obstinate enemies of Christ's gospel and kingdom shall be reckoned with, for the Devil is judged. Thus sinners are convinced and brought to condemn themselves and plead guilty before God (Matthew Henry).

The Holy Spirit the Continuing Teacher of the Apostles

The teaching of Truth is progressively given. From the Law of Moses to the History of God's People, to Prophecy, to the Poetical Books like Psalms and Wisdom Literature like Proverbs. Then comes the New Testament Books, the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and the Revelation. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I have fed you with milk and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (I Cor 3:2).

Our Lord says to the disciples, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (v. 12). For example, the truths of the resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit in power at Pentecost, all these have not taken place yet. It is more logical, after these events have occurred, that lessons on them be given. The Holy Spirit is the continuing Teacher who "will guide you into all truth." Matthew Henry says, "To guide the Apostles, He will take care they do not miss their way. The Spirit guided their tongues in speaking and their pens in writing, to secure them from mistakes. The Spirit is our guide; Romans 8:14, to go with us by continual aids and influences."

Machen says the apostles derived their authority from Jesus' commission who would send the Spirit to guide them into all truth (Jn 16:13). And by virtue of this authority the Apostles added to the Bible of their time the Books that are comprised in the New Testament. The verses of this section particularly give the Apostles the authority to write the N.T. Books because the Holy Spirit is their continuing Teacher. The Books of the N.T. are as inspired as the Books of the O.T., inerrant, infallible. Not only are the Apostles' writings God's Word, their preachings are as much! Machen refers us to I Thess 2:13 where Paul says, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye **heard of us**, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." If any one should criticise any apostle, on any word or deed, let him beware!

“A Little While”?

This phrase our Lord used to describe the events so soon to follow, in a matter of hours, and in the days immediately following, became a riddle to the disciples.

As we see it more clearly from a distance, “a little while” that our Lord talks about is the short separation between them in the arrest, the crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Were not the disciples frightened out of their wits? Were they not bowed down with sorrow? Some might even have given up all hope, being dull to our Lord’s teaching and prophetic utterances. The gloom of despair was heavy, but for “a little while”. “Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

For after His death came the Resurrection, and after the Resurrection, the Ascension (v. 28), and in the truth of the Ascension there was implied the gift of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual return and constant presence of Christ in the Church.

Calvin sees beyond Christ’s showing Himself to the disciples in “a little while.” He sees also the presence of Christ in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. For although He is not seen with the eye, yet His presence is known by the same presence of faith. Christ wanted the disciples to know what would be the state after His death, that they might be contented with His spiritual presence and not regard it as a loss to them, that He no longer dwelt with them as a mortal man.

How the disciples loved their Lord and how they felt sorrowful at missing their Saviour even for “a little while”. Do you miss your Lord, when you are kept from attending Church because of sickness? Does He come to you during those days of confinement? Is He with you all the time?

1. **In that day ye shall ask me nothing (v. 23)**
2. **At that day ye shall ask in my Name (v. 26)**

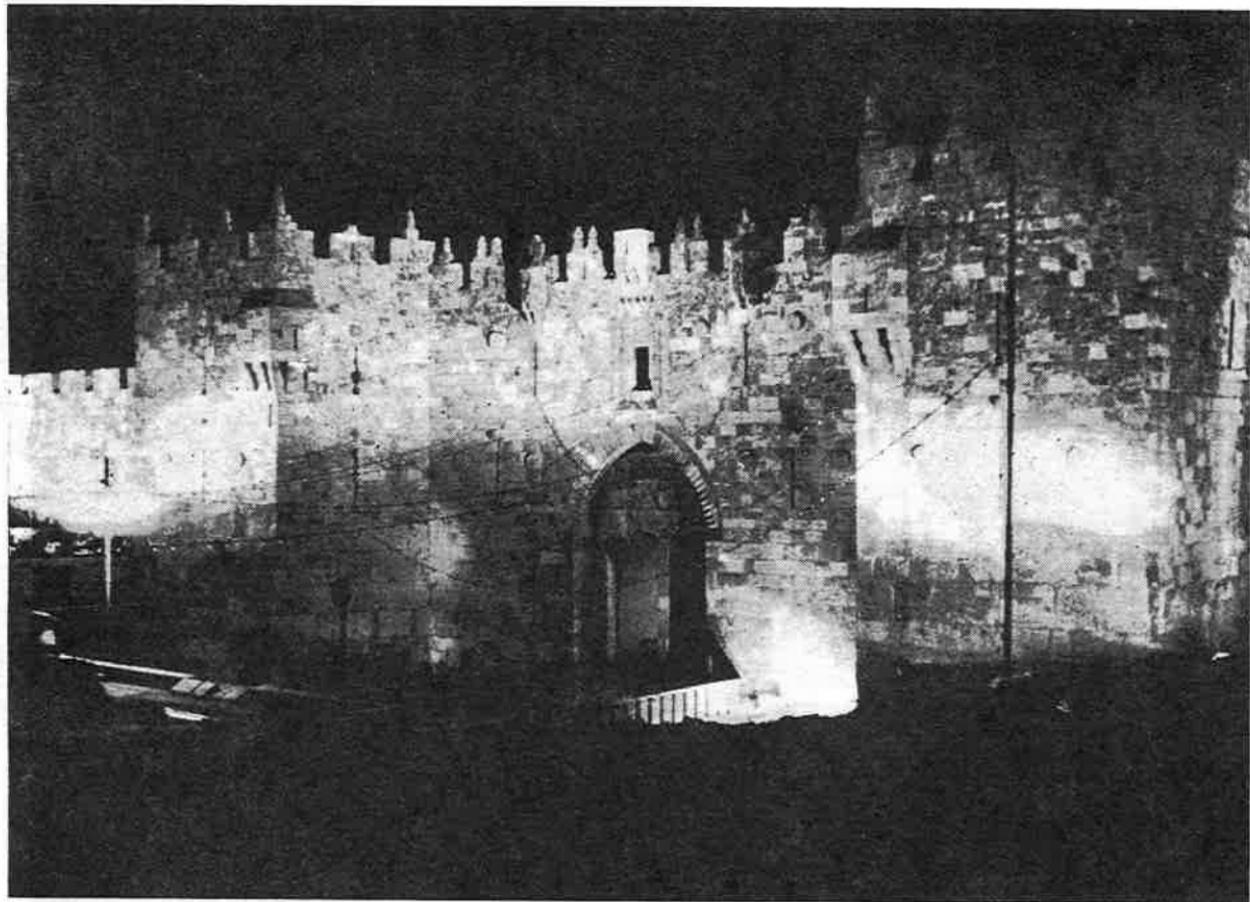
These two sentences seem contrary to each other!

1. **In that day** (v. 23) refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit who will fully illumine them **so they shall not need to ask** the meaning of new thoughts and words as they have done hitherto. Read I John 2:27, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you and ye need not any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him." "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (I Jn 2:20).

2. **At that day ye shall ask in my Name** (v. 26). Calvin comments: Was God first invoked in the name of Christ at that time? Christ is describing the future when the Father will give the disciples whatever they ask **in His Name**.

"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my Name" (v. 24). Did the disciples, keeping to the Old Law, refrain from coming boldly to ask before God, unless there was a Mediator? For the Veil of the Temple was still drawn across, the true High Priest had not yet entered into the heavenly sanctuary to intercede for His people, nor yet had consecrated the way by His blood. But now Christ was making expiation, and will soon be received into Heaven. He openly showed Himself to be the Mediator and in His Name our prayers to the Father will now be heard.

Praise God, a new and living way (Heb 10:20) in the Name of Jesus Christ is opened to all believers. There is no need of any human priest, Jewish or Roman Catholic. Come to Him, Tell Him all your needs. In His Name your prayers will be answered, according to the will of the Father, and not by any other name nor by any human mediator. Thus we must always conclude our prayers to God "in Jesus' Name. Amen."



Floodlit Damascus Gate, Jerusalem.



The Golden Gate viewed from Gethsemane.

“The Just shall live by Faith”

Hitherto, we have not set aside any day for special commemoration, though the Protestant Calendar is slowly being encroached upon by man-made Days. For example, Mother's Day and Father's Day. At the time of the 16th Century Reformation, because practically every other Lord's Day was given over to the commemoration of some martyr or saint, the Reformers abolished those festive days altogether, some including Christmas and Easter. Today, we celebrate Easter and Christmas, and we are blessed if we do so reverently, and not as the world does for its own sake.

One Day we should revive in the Protestant Calendar is Reformation Sunday. This day fell on Oct 31, 1517 (ever since celebrated as the birthday of the Reformation). This day saw Luther at noonday nailing his famous 95 theses on the door of the castle-church at Wittenberg. It was his protest after long meditation. Luther chose Oct 31 because this was the eve of All Saints' Day (Nov 1), one of the most frequented feasts and, according to Philip Schaff, "attracted professors, students, and all people from all directions to the Church which was filled with precious relics."

The first salvo against the soul-chaining fortress of the Roman Church was fired for this was Luther's direct challenge to the Pope trying to make more money by selling indulgences to the people. The more money you pay for the soul of a loved one suffering in purgatory, the shorter will be his sentence of suffering. Can money bribe God? or man?

The way of salvation as twisted by the Roman Church is through Christ, through Mary, by the prayers of saints and martyrs plus your own good works. This is far from the message given by Paul to the Church at Rome in the first century, when he emphatically declared **“The just shall live by faith.”** Praise God, it was Luther who brought us back to the apostolic faith, which is further declared in Eph 2:8, 9. "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" Can it be any clearer?

Today we must remember the blessings given through the 16th Century Reformation lest we lose them in our generation when apostate Protestantism is fast re-uniting with Rome. We are sons of the Reformation. We are justified not by works, but by faith, for the just shall live by faith!

Witness to Roman Catholics through RPG!

Chapter XVII

To the Father's own elect ones, Jesus Christ effectuates the Mediator of Life.

The whole of this chapter is known as the Lord's High Priestly Prayer. ("Our Father" in Matt. 6:9-13 is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer"). J.C. Ryle says of this much longer Prayer: "It is wonderful as a specimen of the communion that was ever kept up between the Father and the Son, during the period of the Son's ministry on earth. It is wonderful as a pattern of intercession which the Son, as a High Priest is ever carrying on for us in heaven. Not least it is wonderful as an example of the sort of things that believers should mention in prayer. What Christ asks for His people, His people should ask for themselves. It has been well and truly said by an old divine that, "the best and fullest sermon ever preached was followed by the best of prayers." (The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Jas. 5:16).

Scofield analyses this Prayer into seven petitions:

- 1) That Jesus may be glorified as the Son who has glorified the Father (v. 1, Phil. 2:9-11).
- 2) For restoration of the eternal glory (v. 5).
- 3) For the safety of believers from (a) the world (v. 11), (b) the evil one (v. 16).
- 4) For the sanctification of believers (v. 17).
- 5) For the spiritual unity of believers (v. 21).
- 6) That the world may believe (v. 21).
- 7) That believers may be with Him in heaven to behold and share His glory.

This chapter contains many deep things. J.C. Ryle further comments, "There are sentences, words, and expressions in the 26 verses of this chapter which no one probably has ever unfolded completely. We have not minds to do it, or to understand the matter it contains, if we could. But there are great truths in the chapter which stand out clearly and plainly on its face, and to these truths we shall do well to direct our best attention."

The burden of this Prayer however is our Lord's concern for the elect, you and me who have believed in Him and love Him. You are one of the elect if you have tasted the sweetness of Jesus' saving grace!

**1. That Jesus Christ may be glorified as the Son
Who has glorified the Father (v. 1; Phil. 2:9-11)**

In the first petition that Christ be glorified, it means to give glory to the Son by carrying Him through the cross and the grave. That He might accomplish the work He was sent into the world to do, whereby He might be exalted to the right hand of God and given the name that is above every other name.

Stier remarks, "These words prove the Son is equal to the Father, as touching the Godhead. What creature could stand before his Creator and say, "Glorify Me, that I may glorify Thee"? The glory of God is the end of all creation (Shorter Catechism A.1) But nothing brings such glory as Christ's finishing the work of redemption by His death, resurrection and ascension."

We know how Jesus' resurrection and ascension are glorious aspects of His redemptive work. Can it be said of His death with two thieves nailed beside Him, and He Himself hung naked on the cross? J.M. Neale says, "But just as we think an earthly general more glorious when he is in the heat of battle, covered with blood and sweat and dust, than when he is clothed in purple and in fine linen, and in the midst of triumph, so our Lord in one sense was more glorious when He was lifted on the cross than ever—I say with all reverence—when He rose from the dead. (Read Phil 2:9-11).

Let us therefore glorify Christ the more in His death and remember Him at the Lord's Table wherein His glory shines the brighter. Perhaps it is from the glory of His death that an analogy is drawn by the British Colonial Government who erected a Cenotaph at the Singapore Padang to "Our Glorious Dead". If they who died in two World Wars were glorious for the cause of righteousness, how much more our Lord who died to confer righteousness and life on sinful dying men! (v. 2-4).

In the cross of Christ, I glory
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

2. For restoration to the eternal glory

“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (v. 5).

“The meaning of this verse I take to be as follows: ‘Father, my earthly work being now finished, I ask to be restored to that heavenly glory which in an unspeakable manner I had with Thee, as one of the co-equal and undividing Trinity, long before this world existed. The period of my humiliation and self-imposed weakness being accomplished, let Me once more share Thy glory, and sit with Thee on Thy throne as I did before my incarnation.’ It is needless to say that the things asked in this prayer both here and elsewhere, are very deep, and reach far beyond man’s understanding. The glory which the Son had with the Father, in the time before creation of the world, is a matter passing our comprehension. But the pre-existence of Christ, the doctrine that Father and Son are two distinct persons, and the equal glory of the Father and the Son, are at any rate taught here very plainly. It seems perfectly impossible to reconcile the verse with the Socinian theory—that Christ was a mere man, like David or Paul, and did not exist before He was born at Bethlehem. Let us also learn the practical lesson, that a prayer for glory comes best from those who have done work upon earth for God. A lazy wish to go to glory without working is not according to Christ’s example.”—J.C. Ryle. (Socinianism leads to Unitarianism).

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” In this doxology by the apostle Paul in I Tim 3:15 we see Christ come from glory, returning to glory! Unless Christ is God, He has no glory to return to.

John 17:6-15

3. For the Safety of Believers from a) The World; b) The Evil One

In this extended passage Jesus shows a caring concern for His disciples, like a loving mother for her children. As a mother cares for the brood she has brought up, from conception to birth, from birth to infancy, from infancy to adolescence, so our Lord thinks upon His own as the elect of God (the men which Thou gavest me out of the world) who have received the message He preached, and His person as from the Father above. These chosen ones come under Christ's High Priestly Prayer, not those outside in the world.

Now that He was to leave them in person, He did not leave them to fend for themselves. He prayed for their safekeeping, inasmuch as "none of them is lost, but the son of perdition" (v. 12). Here is a most comforting thought to you and me who are trusting in Him. We have "eternal security", divine guarantee of our salvation, unless we become traitors like Judas, the son of perdition. ("Perdition" means "utter ruin"). Truly, the eternal security we have in Christ is a most comforting thought even as our Lord expects "that they (His disciples) may have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (v. 13).

Christ keeps us safe not by removing us out of this world, but rather that we might be protected from the world's hostility and from the machinations of the evil one. Why? Because we are His hands and feet to continue His witness unto the Truth while He is ascended on high. (Read v. 18).

The story is told of an angel enquiring of our Lord upon His arrival at the portals of heaven, "Before You ascended here, You told your disciples to go into the world to preach the Gospel to every creature. What if your disciples will not?" The Risen Saviour replied, "I have no other way. I depend on them, my hands and feet on earth." We who enjoy peace and protection from the world and the devil cannot abuse that peace by doing nothing for the Lord.

4. For the sanctification of believers

5. For the spiritual unity of believers

While Jesus has asked the Father to guard His children against the attacks of the world and of the evil one, He sees a greater peril from within. That is that they might give way themselves to the inroads of the world and of Satan. Proof: the big turnover in many churches of dropouts, backsliders. Can you name some in the apostolic church?

How to guard them from within? Sanctify them! That is consecrate, or devote, set apart them entirely to Himself and defend them as His sacred property (Calvin). And the means of this setting them apart process is with His truth. Truth not in a theoretical sense but according to "Thy Word".

Word here means the teaching of the Gospel which the apostles had heard from the Master's mouth. In the complete sense it must be the whole Bible inasmuch as Paul has declared that the Church is cleansed with the washing of water by the Word. (Eph. 5:6) How important it is to read and meditate on the Bible daily. God's Word is the most powerful means of grace to keep us from temptation and from the evil one.

During the early days of the 16th Century Reformation there were fanatics among the Anabaptists who relied on visions and hallucinations to be God's communications to them, at the expense of the Word. These were denounced by Calvin who clung to the Scriptures. Today there has arisen a similar phenomenon of those who stress more on self-revelations, dreams and visions than on the Word of God. This is the surest way to perdition.

Apart from sanctifying them by the Word Jesus prays for unity of believers of the coming generations, for a more effective witness to the world. Here is a Biblical ecumenism of believers who are grounded on the Truth, who stand together on His Holy Word. But this verse (21) has been used by promoters of the Ecumenical Movement to drive towards a super world church, for a reunion with Rome and a syncretism with human religions. The unity that Jesus prays about is spiritual as that which binds the branches to the tree and not humanly organised unity, Satan's great deception to the church of the end-times. If you are a member of a church linked to the World Council of Churches, what must you do?

- 6. That the world may believe.**
- 7. That believers may be with Him in Heaven to behold and share His glory.**

As we have stated, there is a Biblical ecumenism, a unity of believers against fragmentation of the Church that works as a more effective witness to the world (v. 23). What Jesus is talking about is not separation from unbelief which is Biblical and legitimate. What Jesus is talking about is schism, which Chambers defines as "breach of unity without justifiable cause" e.g. the schismatic division in the Corinthian Church under the names of Paul and Apollos, under Cephas and even under Christ! (I Cor 1:12). Beware of personality cults in the Church!

When a church is united, great will be her power of witness. "United we stand, divided we fall." Let us therefore be careful to cultivate this spiritual unity that is inherent in the church, as the branches are united with the tree. It is clearly there, not to be built up piece by piece like the Tower of Babel, like the organised unity the World Council of Churches is striving to make. Let us take away the little foxes of egotism, rivalry, jealousy, suspicion, gossip, backbiting, character assassination, and you name them, "that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes" (Song of Solomon 2:15). Beware of little cliques in the Church!

And when we reach heaven will we not be one with Him to behold His glory, and the centre of that glory is love! Our unity in the bonds of Christian love on earth are but a rehearsal and foretaste of the heavenly glory to come when we will not only be with the Son, but also with the Father, the fountain of eternal love. Unity cannot live without the freshened air of love!

Earthly friendship is all but vain
In a mirror can be seen
Men's hearts vary as their faces
But their feelings are the same
Face to face that Day we shall meet,
Gathered round our Father's feet
In sincerity and in truth
And our differences removed.

— Jason Linn

Chapter XVIII

John 18

To desperate disciples who defend Him, Jesus Christ remains their Shield of Life.

Did you notice that between Jn. 14:31 and Jn. 18:1, between leaving the Passover chamber (in Jerusalem city) and entering the Garden of Gethsemane (outside the city) there is a long interlude of three chapters of sermon and prayer? What towering luxuriance of the Word of Life that dwarfs the scanty sayings of Confucius to his disciples! Why don't students of philosophy read the Words of Jesus, for then they must say, the tastings from the Vine of Life are sweeter! And, where are Mao's sayings?

At last, zero hour strikes. John leaves the Gethsemane agony of His Master to the other Evangelists. He tells his story rather abruptly with Traitor Judas and the Jewish Gestapo bursting upon the scene. As abruptly, the Master repelled the assailants with a stentorian "I AM". At that, the strong ones "fell to the ground" (v 6). And did He not do this, like a mother lion defending her whelps, for the safe-keeping of the disciples? "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." How our Lord cares for His own! Do you know He is watching over you even now, every hour, every minute, to keep you from every evil?

Peter the impulsive, with a swish, sliced off Malchus' ear! But Jesus restrained him from further action of his fleshly arm. Jesus, knowing that the hour had arrived, yielded to brute force.

Now the Roman Government had given certain religious freedom to the Jews so that they had their own courts, as the British allowed Muslims in Malaysia to have theirs to determine religious issues. That is why we see Jesus taken not by Roman police but by Jewish Gestapo. It was during our Lord's arraignment before the high priest that Peter, shadowing nervously "outside the palace," denied Him thrice, "and immediately the cock crowed". John, who most probably was with Peter, noted this cockcrow, which the Master had earlier predicted. Even a cock can keep time for the Lord!

From Jewish Sandhedrin to the Roman Governor, but our Saviour was sentenced to death by the kangaroo court of the shouting crowds.

O, the terror of mob psychology! Beware lest you join a crowd to do evil, not knowing the evil you are in!

He Who is Prepared to Die is Not Afraid of Death

We have noted earlier that he who is afraid to die has died a hundred deaths. Conversely, he who is prepared for it is not afraid. Our Lord who wills to permit Himself to be betrayed can never die! The disciples had not learned to steel themselves to this will power yet, but they did when they followed in the Master's footsteps at the end of their lives. Read the parting words of Peter and of Paul! Legend tells us that all the Apostles suffered martyrdom, save John.

Imprisonment and martyrdom have overtaken the Chinese Church. Watchman Nee, on the eve of his release, died, after nearly twenty years spent behind bars. Wang Ming-tao having survived numerous tortures, is now released, a living witness in his eighties. Going through Gethsemane with our Lord, let us of the young generations pray we may stand loyal for His Cause to the end.

What are the verses that tell of our Lord's self-preparation? V. 4 says, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth . . ." He did not run but rather met His captors eyeball to eyeball. Can you stand erect in the face of overpowering odds? Cultivate moral power! Sir Gallahad said, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure." Daniel could stand up to the Lions because he was prepared in his conscience to face his foes. It has been noted that a mouse could have killed him were he of less purity of heart.

The story is told of how Chiang Kai-shek was ambushed by Rebel Chang Hsueh-liang. The unbending moral power of the Generalissimo repelled his captor. Now Chiang Kai-shek was a devout Christian and Madam Chiang also who was with him. "With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm."

Were not the disciples relieved by the forceful character of their Saviour? They went away from the arrest untouched. "That the saying might be fulfilled, which He spoke, 'Of them which Thou gavest me have I lost none.'" (cf. John 17:12).

Memorise: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life **for my sake** shall find it." (Matt. 16:26).

“The Arm of Flesh Will Fail You”

What would we have done the night of the Arrest? You and I would have slunked away in the face of overwhelming odds. So did all the disciples (Matt. 26:56; Mark 15:50) except Peter.

Peter is the only one to stand up for his Lord. It was he who tried to defend Jesus, the stalwart in loyalty and impulsive in action. With a swish, he sliced off the high priest's servant, Malchus' ear. Mr. Loyalty, Sir Bravery! Surely our Lord had appreciated Peter's dash of devotion. Note that nowhere did our Lord chide Peter for his zeal. Peter had acted within the limits of righteous self-defense.

There was a case reported in London of a small Chinese boy who stabbed a big, fat bully of an English classmate in self-defence. When it was proved that this little fellow was intimidated on numerous occasions before this fated stabbing, the jury acquitted him. It is for the reason of self-protection that Jesus before Gethsemane had said to the disciples, “He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one” (Luke 22:36). And when they found two, He remarked, “It is enough.”

While Peter had acted in loyal devotion, there is that characteristic over-impulsiveness in him that must be curbed. Hence the injunction in Matthew 26:52, “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

There is a place for righteous self-defence in a Christian's life, but the sword he should wield always is rather the sword of the Spirit. When the Pilgrim Fathers first arrived in America they had to carry guns to defend themselves against marauding Indians. Ultimately, it was the Gospel that won the natives over.

The internecine strife between Arab and Jew in the Middle East confirms the truth of Jesus' statement. While self-defence might require us to carry a sword, let us not trust in the arm of flesh.

From Pillar to Post

It was the dead of night when they took hold of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. While the other Evangelists focus on the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, it is John who adds the detail of a preliminary inquiry before Annas, the high priest emeritus. His house is thought to be situated on a slope of the Mount of Olives not far from Gethsemane. It is John who points out Caiaphas, the high priest in office as he who had unconsciously spoken the prophecy that "one man should die for the people . . ." which was now in the nervous process of fulfillment.

After trial before the high priest and Jewish leaders Jesus was brought before Pilate. But it is Luke who gives another detail (23:6-12) not recorded by John, Matthew or Mark, of an intervening trial before Herod.

The Jews had inherited from Moses "statutes and judgements so righteous as all this law" (Deuteronomy 4:8) and the Romans had taken from the Jews the Law and transmitted it to all the world. Yet, our Lord was never given a fair trial, nor according to legal procedure. Read each of the four Gospels to get a composite picture. Judge for yourself in the light of modern jurisprudence whether any accused person before a court of law is ever so roughly manhandled like our Lord. Is shuffled around, from pillar to post — from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod back to Pilate to be pressurised by a "people's" kangaroo court. Not to talk of legal aid provided by the crown and other legal rights!

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he openeth not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7). Why? Why was He shuffled from pillar to post in a mock trial and summarily condemned to death? For you! For me!

“Failure is the mother of success”

All four Gospels record the episode of Peter's denial. This must therefore be a very important lesson for us. Can you find the other three accounts? Sword drill!

Of the four accounts it is John that tells the “inside” story. He tells of another disciple who was known to the high priest and it was through him that both gained entry into the high priest's palace. It is generally conjectured that that other disciple was John. How did a country fisherman become a friend of the high priest? A fourth century narrative described John as one who had sold fish at the high priest's door before he gave up the fishing trade.

Be that as it may, it is the perspiring devotion of Peter that is now seen, tested by the fireside. Did Peter know before the first question was put to him by the girl who kept the door that he was going to deny His Master thrice “before the cock crow twice?” (Mk 15:30). Did the words of the Master linger in his ears?

Christian, seek not yet repose!
Hear thy guardian angel say,
Thou art in the midst of foes.
Watch and pray!

The second question came from those who sat by the fireside, according to John, and the third by a witness of the garden scuffle, a servant of the high priest, a relative of Malchus!

This is one basic examination prescribed to Peter and to us, followers of Jesus Christ. An exam which Peter now miserably failed, but gloriously passed at the end of his life. His failure became his success, not only for himself, but to his comrades, too.

Let's not close this book without reciting Jesus' earlier admonition to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brother” (Matt. 22:31, 32).

Have you failed your Saviour? Be comforted! He knows our weakness. He has forgiven us. He desires that we now rise up to serve Him to the end.

When Not To Turn the Other Cheek

“But whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39). This is one famous saying of Jesus quoted by politicians in their counter-arguments, by Singapore’s Second Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Rajaratnam. But Jesus does not teach His followers to turn the other cheek blindly. What He says in the Sermon on the Mount concerns private injury. A Christian would rather suffer loss than demand his pound of flesh in the world’s obsession to retaliate to the hilt.

Jesus is seen here struck by an officer of the high priest’s court. Why didn’t He offer to be struck again? Rather He stood His ground: “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?”. Jesus, now on trial, was bearing witness to the Truth. The inquiry on Him was a public one, and in the interests of Truth, of Justice, He must protest. This incident should be studied by every politician, the more so by Christian leaders of government.

So did Paul stand his ground when struck on the mouth before the Sanhedrin: “God shall smite thee thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” (Acts 23:3).

When on trial for the Truth let your cheek stand up and speak up! And let it glow with Divine boldness above the flame of human faggot and fire. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

“And fear not them which kill the body,
But are not able to kill the soul:
But rather fear him which is able
To destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28).

“Suffered Under Pontius Pilate” — Apostles’ Creed

Although the Sanhedrin had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, a capital crime under Jewish law by stoning, they had no power of execution under Roman jurisdiction. The process of law required them to arraign Him before Pilate the Imperial Procurator. The judgement hall was the Praetorium, his official residence in Jerusalem.

Note that John says “it was early”, signifying how relentless was the Jews’ pursuit of their quarry to the death. They literally pulled the Governor out of bed. This they were able to get by because of Pilate’s misgovernment and need of reconciliation (cf. Luke 23:12). Politics is always ticking in the affairs of men! Another reason for pulling the Governor out was that the Jews could not enter “the judgement hall” at this time, for if they did they would be unclean and the Passover season was on.

Chafing at the indignity of being awakened at such an hour, Pilate tried to throw the case back to the Jewish court. The Jews clamoured for his attention and ratification, because while they had found Jesus guilty they needed his sentence “to the gallows”. John remembers at this point Jesus’ prediction sometime before Palm Sunday on the manner of His trial and execution (Matthew 20:18, 19). “He who is prepared to die is not afraid of death.”

Compelled by law to try the case, Pilate examined Jesus in the judgement hall. The case against Jesus before the Roman Governor seemed twisted to suit its purpose, injecting into the new accusation “King of the Jews” an element of sedition against the Roman government. Under Jesus’ counter-questioning if that was Pilate’s accusation or the Jews’, Pilate tried to evade, knowing he was serving the Jews’ wily wishes.

Testifying fearlessly to His mission and to the nature of His kingdom, Jesus stated, indeed, He was a king, a royal witness to the Truth. All lovers of Truth were His subjects. Pilate was familiar with philosophic language: here’s that Stoic aphorism that the Wise Man is a King and the Platonic saying that philosophers are kings and kings should be philosophers. Laughing at Truth and its King, he turned to placate Falsehood.

Chapter XIX

Before Caesar's Governor Who Tries Him Jesus Christ Royally Stands the King of Life

John, in conjunction with Matthew and Mark, relates the scourging of Jesus and how He was mocked as King of the Jews with purple robe and thorny crown.

As all the other disciples had fled and Peter was remorsefully hiding for shame of his denials, it was John who kept a continuing vigil over his Master's movements to the end. As his purpose is to supplement what the other Evangelists have missed, particularly his own eyewitness accounts, he gives us a briefing of Pilate's argument with the Jews outside the judgement hall at the Pavement, called Gabbatha in the Hebrew. Were you there when they screamed for Jesus' death?

With the other Evangelists John takes us to Golgotha (in Hebrew, place of a skull), Calvary in Latin (Luke 23:33). While John omits what the other Evangelists have emphasised, he tells his tender personal story of a new relationship conferred on him and Mary, the Lord's mother. John stayed to the very last till he heard the Saviour's Victory Cry, "It is finished!"

John lingered on with his account of Jesus being pierced in the side. A marvellous thing happened — there was an immediate release of blood and water! John trebly restates the truth of this mysterious phenomenon.

Let the Water and the Blood
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanser me from its guilt and power.

Jesus having died so quickly, there was no need for the practice of crurifragium or leg-breaking.

John concludes with Jesus' burial in the new tomb of Joseph Arimathaea, a secret disciple, with the addition of Nicodemus' loving part. How it ties so beautifully with him who came to Jesus by night. You never can tell what fruit will be borne from the witnessing of a single hour!

And He made His grave with the wicked,
And with the rich in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Neither was any deceit in His mouth. (Isa. 53:9).

“I Find No Fault in Him”

In the preliminary session with the Jews after examining Jesus in the judgment hall, it is significant to note that weak as his hand was in yielding to the cry for Barabbas, Pilate declared, “I find in him no fault at all.” (John 18:38).

Troubled by a guilty conscience of momentarily giving in to mob-violence, Pilate had Jesus scourged. This the vacillating judge did in order to placate Christ’s accusers with some measure of punishment: “Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.” (John 19:4). This the more aroused the ire of the chief priests and officers. “Crucify him, crucify him”, was their blood-curdling demand.

Calvin comments, “When he strives so earnestly and unsuccessfully, we ought to see in this the decree of heaven by which Christ was appointed to death. Yet his innocence is frequently asserted by the judge’s testing, to teach us that, free from all guilt, he was substituted as guilty for others, and bore the punishment due to the sins of others.” Here is dramatised the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement that Christ died, the just for the unjust to pay for the penalty of our sins. When Pilate at last would let the Jews take away to crucify, he declared for the third time, “For, I find no fault in him.” (John 19:6).

Overpowered by that troubled conscience Pilate fought a last-ditch delaying action. He wanted to know more of the Jews’ accusation that He had made Himself the Son of God. He thought he could still rescue this innocent man, and it tugged strongly in his heart that he must rescue him. With quickened assurance he asked the Prisoner, “Don’t you realise that I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” The Theologian-in-crisis however saw a Higher Power: “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.” Though events leading to Christ’s death were decreed of God, each actor on the stage of destiny was accountable for his act, whether good or bad. This is a high mystery of the doctrine of predestination, taught by the Master Himself. (Read Mark 14:21).

Pilate, though having washed his hands of the blood of the Just Man (Matthew 27:24) must one day stand trial before Him who was delivered to the Jews by his vacillating act. Don’t ride two legs on two boats is good Chinese advice!

During the Japanese occupation of Singapore the Lion City was called Syonan. Under the new Imperial government the people had to keep two times: Synon time, as well as Tokyo time!

During the time of Christ, the Jews were under Roman rule. There was the Jewish way of reckoning time as well as the Roman way.

The Jews count their hours from 6 am to 6 pm as they do to this day insofar as the Sabbath is concerned. The Romans, from Midnight to Noon.

Now if we read the clock in the Synoptic Gospels and the clock in John's Gospel, we will discover that the former go by the Jewish clock and the latter by the Roman clock. Thus John 19:14 tells us it was about the sixth hour that Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your king," The sixth hour here is 6 am. **About** 6 am could be 6.10 or 6.15 am. This would fit into Mark's account which says Jesus was crucified the third hour (Jewish) or 9 am.

Another difficulty about the time element is the phrase, "preparation of the passover" in John 19:14, and "eat the passover" in John 18:28. Did not our Lord and the disciples keep the passover the previous night? According to these verses it seems John had made a serious mistake. Not at all! Dr. David Smith says, "The phrase 'eat the passover' denoted not merely participation in the Paschal Supper (Passover meal) which they had already celebrated the previous night, but participation in all the business of Holy Week, especially the feast of thanksgiving (chagigah) on the afternoon of the day succeeding the Supper. Hence their refusal to enter the Praetorium (judgment hall) that morning. The defilement thus contracted would have continued until the evening, and thereby they would be excluded from the feast of the thanksgiving in the afternoon.

As to 'preparation of the Passover', the word 'preparation' here does not mean 'make ready' for the Passover feast but rather make preparation for the Sabbath which begins Friday 6 pm (of the Passover week). Thus at the close of the narrative of the Crucifixion Matthew says of the next day that followed the preparation to be Saturday, or the hightide of the Jewish Sabbath. Mark puts it more clearly in 15:42, "And now when the even (evening) was come, because it was the preparation, that is the day before Sabbath..." This is some time before Friday 6 pm. It has got nothing to do with making ready for the Passover Supper which had occurred already.

The King of the Jews

While the Synoptic Gospels generally mention the inscription over Jesus' head, it is John who gives us the fullest wording. The main point of the inscription is **The King of the Jews**.

Who is the King of the Jews? Surely not this Nazarene, this Jesus whom the Jews had delivered to be executed! The Jews were looking for the Messiah, the anointed King of their own aspirations, one to deliver them from the Romans. To write "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" was a great insult to the Jewish national spirit. But wasn't this the charge the Jews had brought to gain Roman sympathy? In wording the inscription as above, we see Pilate paying the Jews back in their own coin. When requested to reword "This is Jesus of Nazareth who said I am the King of the Jews", Pilate, smiling gleefully up his sleeves, flatly refused! Sweet revenge! What Pilate had written, while it offended the Jews, greatly pleased God! Pilate was merely restating the Truth he had unconsciously imbibed from Jesus' own testimony. Did He not royally stand before him a King, and further declared to him He was King? King of Kings, and King of the Jews in that He is the Greater Son of David, and will one day return to judge this earth sitting on His father's throne? Jesus indeed is King of the Jews! How we wish our Jewish friends will discover this truth and come, bow down before Him, and be saved!

Every Christmas message is a special message to the Jews, to Israel in her throes of fighting for survival in the hostile Arab world.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, **upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom**, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

This despised nobody from Nazareth will one day so astonish the Jews as their King and the whole world as their Judge. And until the King of the Jews who is Prince of Peace returns to earth, there shall be no peace. Presidents and Prime Ministers, take note!

Fulfilling Prophecy, Fulfilling Theology

Four soldiers (cf. Acts 12:4) were assigned the unsavoury task of crucifying three victims. As the custom was, what were worn by the executed became the property of the executioners. Now our Lord, like every Jew, had five pieces of apparel—turban, outer garment, belt, sandals, and fifthly, a tunic. Whether the soldiers divided the first four items among themselves by lot or not we do not know, but they did with the fifth. The reason was it was one woven piece without seam. To divide it would totally ruin it. Therefore they cast lots for this 'coat'. In so doing they fulfilled another Messianic prophecy (Psalm 22:18) from David's pen.

David, the ancestor of our Lord in the flesh, most typified His Greater Son. Many of the events in his life adumbrated those that were to occur in our Lord's. This utterance, "They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots" was inspired by the Holy Spirit to have direct reference to Christ. It is estimated there are 332 distinct prophecies in the Old Testament which have been fulfilled in Christ. He is the Man sent by God, He is the God-appointed Saviour.

Now the deeper truth about the fulfilment of David's prophecy in Psalm 22:18 is this, as pointed out by Hendriksen: By stripping the Victim to the last strand of clothing, our Lord became totally exposed. But it pleased the Lord that insult be added upon injury to His Son ("and we hid as it were our faces from him" Isaiah 53:3) in order that our nakedness be clothed with His Righteousness. We must ever pause in grateful abhorrence of a smitten Saviour who gave us not only His blood but also His clothes. Thank God for Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6) who removes not only our guilt but also covers our shame. He fulfilled prophecy in order to fulfill theology.

**“Having loved His own . . . He loved them unto the end.”
(John 13:1)**

“Love is as strong as death” (Song of Solomon). Thus when the Ten disciples were fled from the Master, John the Eleventh, the disciple whom Jesus loved and who loved Jesus, and the women who also loved Jesus, kept vigil by the cross.

The women who loved Jesus were naturally His mother, his mother's sister, Mary wife of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene. Of the last three, the best known is Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. She who is forgiven much loveth much. Surely the loving sympathy shown by Jesus' beloved disciple and by the women had encouraged our Saviour to persevere on the cross. “Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree . . . Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble . . .”

The loving kindness of Mary to the Lord, her Son, to the last evoked a reciprocal filial piety. Having also His beloved disciple by His side, He honoured John by entrusting His mother to his care. Suppose Mary and John had not come? How many a blessing have we missed by not coming to Church, to the Lord's Table, to the Prayer Meeting, to a Church Camp or Conference, where our Lord is there to bless. For “where two or three are gathered together in my Name there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20). But unless our attendance is spontaneous, motivated by the same love that drew John and the women to the foot of the cross, our service for the Lord would not avail.

A Chinese servant told her story how she had served her European towkay at his seaside mansion in the last days of his lonesome life. Yet, when he died, all she got from him was a T.V. set. A question arose in my mind: If she had served him as earnestly the many years before this, might she not have been rewarded with the house? How we attend to our Lord is important.

Christ is the best Master to work for. For He loves His servants and promotes them to be His friends, yea, His very own. “Having loved His own He loved them to the end”.

“... was crucified, dead and buried.” — Apostles’ Creed

This statement from the Apostles’ Creed is based on St. Paul’s definition of the Gospel in I Cor. 15:1-4 “... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried...”

As for the Apostle John he describes as an eye-witness the physical suffering of our Lord, how as His blood ran thin, He thirsted. And how when He was relieved by vinegar, He gathered strength to utter the Victory cry, “It is finished”, before He bowed His last.

As death in an execution must be medically certified in modern judicature, the same was required under Roman law. In our Lord’s case, His death was trebly attested by John, as blood and water flowed from His pierced, riven side. This led to the fulfilment of a double Messianic prophecy.

Whether Jesus died of a broken heart literally is a matter of argument. The fact recorded in Scripture is that He died. He died as a result of fully suffering the pains of death on the cross for our sins. This fact is important because if He did not die, our penalty was not fully paid. Our salvation would not be complete.

The fact that He died repels such heretical attacks by enemies of the Gospel: 1) An ancient heresy of the second century called Docetism held that Christ had no real body or human soul. His earthly manifestation in human form was a phantasm, a mere appearance without substance or reality. Hence those heretics were called Docetists, from the Greek verb which means ‘to appear’. According to the Docetists, Christ’s whole earthly life was an illusion. This denial of the human nature of Christ is condemned by John in 1 John 4:1-3.

2) The death of Christ refutes a modernist lie called the swoon theory. This theory suggests Christ did not really die, but swooned. There in the coolness of the tomb He revived! (New Bible Dictionary) But the evidence from the beloved disciple is that Christ did die, for blood and water had flowed from His riven side. A dead person had swooned a hundred times over!

The burial of Jesus is again fully attested, the well-known people involved are mentioned by name, the beauty spot identified, and the hour recorded. For unless Christ had died and was buried, how could there be a resurrection? Hence the account of His crucifixion, death and burial is repeated in the Apostles’ Creed for our salvation.

‘Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? ... Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble ...’

Chapter XX

**“ the third day He arose again
from the dead.” — Apostles’ Creed.**

The eye-witness to our Lord’s crucifixion, death and burial has plenty more to tell of His Resurrection! The miracle of His resurrection is one of “many signs that truly Jesus did in the presence of his disciples” and is written “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ; the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in His Name.” (Jn. 20:31).

John gives us a more detailed account of the first Appearance that Easter Sunday morning than the other Evangelists because he was one of the two groups of disciples who went to the Empty Tomb.

It is he who retells Mary Magdalene’s eye-witness story. Although the other women who were with Mary Magdalene at the cross also went, these are not mentioned particularly in John except in the “we” of Jn. 20:2. It tells also of John’s race with Peter to the Tomb and how although he outran the older man, it was Peter who went into the sepulchre to examine the “scene”.

John elaborates further on Luke’s account of the Appearance to the Ten. Thomas in absentia, and John alone completes with the Appearance to the Eleven on the following Lord’s Day, Thomas now present. According to Jewish way of inclusive calculation, like the Chinese, after eight days means after seven days in the English way of calculation.

“Peace be unto you”, (Shalom) the usual custom of Hebrew salutation takes on a brighter meaning when used by the Risen Saviour for His brethren (Jn. 20:17). And when it is used a second time (Jn. 20:26), its usage should be confirmed upon the whole Christian Church! “Peace be unto you” was the new salutation taught by early missionaries to China to their converts. It has since gained currency in greetings between Christians in speech and letter correspondence. In countries that have experienced little peace, especially China which is in constant turmoil of revolutions, “Peace be unto you” when uttered in salutations has brought comfort and hope and cheer from Him who has conquered death and risen victorious from the grave. Peace to you, my Reader, whatever your trouble! Upon this Lord’s Day, be sure to meet the Risen Saviour with your brethren in Church!

Why first to Mary Magdalene?

There were two parties of disciples who converged on the Garden Tomb that first Easter Lord's Day morning: 1) The women, headed by Mary Magdalene; 2) Peter and John. Not knowing the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead (Ps. 16:10), the women had brought along spices and ointments (Luke 23:56), an expression of their womanly love. Nor Peter and John, for sure.

Of the disciples who came to see Jesus, it is Mary Magdalene who was given the honour of the first Appearance by our Lord. Why? Why should one who was a bad sinner, out of whom seven devils were cast out (Lk 8:2), receive such blessing? Here is the manifestation of God's unspeakable grace! As the chorus goes: "My past is forgiven, From sin I am free!" Being seven-fold indebted to her Lord, her love for Jesus correspondingly exceeded that of others. Of all our Lord's followers, none seemed, not even John, to have loved so much as Mary Magdalene. Bishop Andrews observes, "She was last at His cross, and first at His grave. She stayed longest there, and was soonest here."

"Love is strong as death," says Solomon. Love is the greatest motivating power! Love is also the greatest sustaining power. Love is God-power, for God is love (1 John 4:8).

Thus when it was discovered that the Tomb was empty, those who came with Mary left the scene, one by one. It was Mary Magdalene whose steps were quickened by love who now was constrained by the same to linger. As much as to say, "I will never leave You, Lord, until I find You." That devotion and earnest-seeking is what the lukewarm Church of Laodicea lacks today. What we need is Mary's love, even the first love of the Church of Ephesus.

In the University of Christ, knowledge is often seen to puff up, but it is love, unassuming, that receives the conferment of Christ's degree. Why not first to Mary Magdalene?

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb 10:24).

Peter and John

If Mary Magdalene is commended for her sevenfold love for Jesus, Peter must be commended also — for his deep-seated loyalty for his Master. Though he had betrayed Him in a moment of weakness under overcrushing odds, his bitter tears of repentance had washed every stain — of seeming disloyalty. That our Lord had looked upon him reminded of His loving words of caution and care spoken a while ago: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lk. 22:31, 32.)

That Peter was not behind the others on that early Easter morning’s pilgrimage speaks well of his restored heart. How he vowed to love Christ three times more! In Peter’s restoration is contrasted Judas’ perdition. How do we know Judas was lost? His self-destruction sealed it. But not Peter! Christian, whatever your sin, whatever your defeat, never say die, like Peter. Repent, return, while the Lord just now is looking upon you.

As for John, the beloved disciple from beginning to end, he is to be commended for not only taking care of our Lord’s mother, but also for his concern for his big brother. Surely he was the one who looked Peter up, and told him where they had had laid Him. Who else could it be? He was the one who learned from Mary’s lips her personal meeting with the Risen Saviour.

The characteristics of the two men disciples are once again so typically revealed. Peter the man of impulsive action, though outrun by John the younger man, nevertheless, was forward to enter the sepulchre. But, John looked on, and pondered. The important thing is that both **believed** that Christ was risen, and the proof of this stupendous fact to them was the empty tomb with the napkin and linen-clothes in their places. At least that is John’s personal testimony (Jn. 20:8). Today, God has His Peters and Johns, each with his individual characteristic, some quick, some slow. The important thing is that we believe in His Risen Son, and love Him though we have not seen Him.

Here’s Peter’s Easter message, “Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Peter 1:8).

Not theological spectacles but through tears of love

Some commentators look askance at Mary of Magdalene with their theological spectacles cocked, but they have never had the honour of meeting with the Risen Saviour. They speak rather harshly of Mary's ignorance and superstition, which we do not agree.

It was Mary's tears that moved the Risen Saviour first to her side. It was Mary's weeping from a yearning, loving heart that induced our Lord to send His angels. While it is true, according to Calvin, that Christ initiated the glory of His kingdom by angels to honour His tomb and take away the ignominy of the cross, we believe the angels were sent for Mary's sake. Mary's tears of love.

The words "Woman why weepest thou?" were asked not in admonition but in sympathy. With tape-recording of the syllables this would then be verified!

When Jesus suddenly stood behind her and asked the same question, and added "Whom seekest thou?", it was a Shepherd's love reciprocating to the lost ewe lamb. Nor can we blame Mary when she, still in an emotional flood, persisted to anoint her Lord with the spices she had brought. Our extremity is His opportunity.

It is in this valley of tears that Jesus revealed Himself to Mary, calling her in that loving accent she was wont to hear, "Mary" (Miriam in the Hebrew). M-a-r-y! Why, that is the Master's Voice! "Rabboni," returned one having her eyes suddenly opened. That first Appearance to the disciples had occurred!

When joined in one are Voice and voice,
Then lift her eyes to see His Face!

It is important that God's Word be studied with a yearning, loving heart. How many a vision of His love, sympathy, power, majesty is lost when spectacled professors look for the trees but miss the woods. Greek particles and Hebrew pointings to the last jot and tittle, precision upon dry precision, but no Vision! That Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, but not to Rev. Peter or Elder John is a lesson Church leaders must take note.

Conversely, let those who have neither power or means, but that nurtured love reserved for his or her Lord take courage with Mary.

Not theological spectacles, but through tears of love.

Through Tears of Love and Joy

Now that Mary had found her Lord alive and transformed in all His resurrection glory, her first reaction was to fall at His feet to kiss Him (cf. Matthew 28:9). In the process, He retreated a step: "Touch me not" (or cling not to Me — a phrase which Simon the Pharisee had used when he saw her, a sinful woman, caressing His feet as He reclined at table, and protested that had He been a prophet, He would have perceived what sort of woman she was who was thus "clinging to Him". Luke 7:39. (David Smith).

Now since He permitted His disciples, according to Matthew, to touch Him (cf. John 20:37), what reason had He for restraining Mary from doing the same? Calvin says the answer is easy to find so long as we understand the women were not repulsed from touching Christ until they touched Him overmuch. For as far as removing doubt, He certainly did not forbid them to touch Him, but when He saw that they were too much occupied with embracing His feet, He tempered and corrected their thoughtless zeal... manifesting as it were their desire to keep Him in the world.

In the words, "For I am not yet ascended unto the Father". Christ showed the purpose of His resurrection. It was not what they had imagined, that when He returned to life He would be as He lived with them before, but rather that His resurrection would lead to His ascension. His resurrection took Him to a new dimension from which He would dwell with His own by the Holy Spirit Whom the Father would send.

Having understood the truth of this new relationship between disciple and Master, Mary Magdalene with tears of joy was sent to tell His "brethren". What a wonderful relationship between us and our Lord! He is not only the Risen Saviour to save us from our sins, but the Ascended Lord to heaven from where He rules the world now, seated at the Father's right hand. "All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth" with His ascension. And because Christ is ascended on high He occupies such a vantage position as most efficaciously to hear and attend to the prayers of His children. With joy let us also go out to witness to our Risen and Ascended Saviour, from where He will soon return to judge the world.

The First Lord's Day Evening with the Risen Lord

This passage must be read in conjunction with Luke 24:13-45.

The Risen Saviour had first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20; 14-18); second, to the women returning from the tomb with the angelic message (Mt 28:8-19); third, to Peter (Lk 24:34); fourth, to the Emmaus disciples towards evening (Lk 24:13-31). This was his fifth appearance. What excitement after throbbing excitement!

From Luke's account and John's we see that the disciples were gathered hush-hush behind shut doors. There were Mary Magdalene's and the women's report of Christ's Appearance early that day. Peter related his experience how the Lord had come to assure him of forgiveness. Then came in the two disciples, running some seven or eight miles back from Emmaus and reporting on their travelling Companion. In the hushed excitement amidst muffled mouths and open eyes, suddenly Jesus in their midst and greeted them, "Peace be unto you!" Luke tells us the disciples were affrighted, supposing to have seen a Spirit. To prove Himself, Jesus offered His hands and feet to be felt, while he ate a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb to enhance his credentials. John who saw the blood and water flow from His side adds Jesus also showed His side. This brought joy in the hearts of the uncertain disciples.

What was more important than proving His resurrection (now that it was ascertained) was the great commission to send them with the salvation message into all the world. He also gives them the Holy Spirit and power to forgive sins. The power to forgive sins is not vested in priest or pope, but in the preaching of the Gospel, when blessed by the Holy Spirit. It is not an executive, but a declarative ministry. And this ministry is committed not to Peter alone, as the Roman Catholics claim, but to all the apostles.

The First Evening of the Resurrection was the inauguration of a new order for the Christian Church, who must now spread the Message to all the world. And that new order is committed to every Church, old or young. How much have we carried out this Commission?

The Second Lord's Day with Thomas

Why Thomas was not present with the others on the first Lord's Day evening we are not told. But his reaction to the resurrection reports is told in no uncertain terms. Thomas doubted. Thomas preached his doctrine, "Seeing is believing, and touching is doubly believing." His faith, inexperienced faith, under such doubting, was smothered. Calvin says such obstinacy of not taking the other apostles at their word is evidence that this wickedness is innate in almost all men. Are you of the doubting type? Very intellectual? That will be assessed in the light of what the Risen Christ says later on.

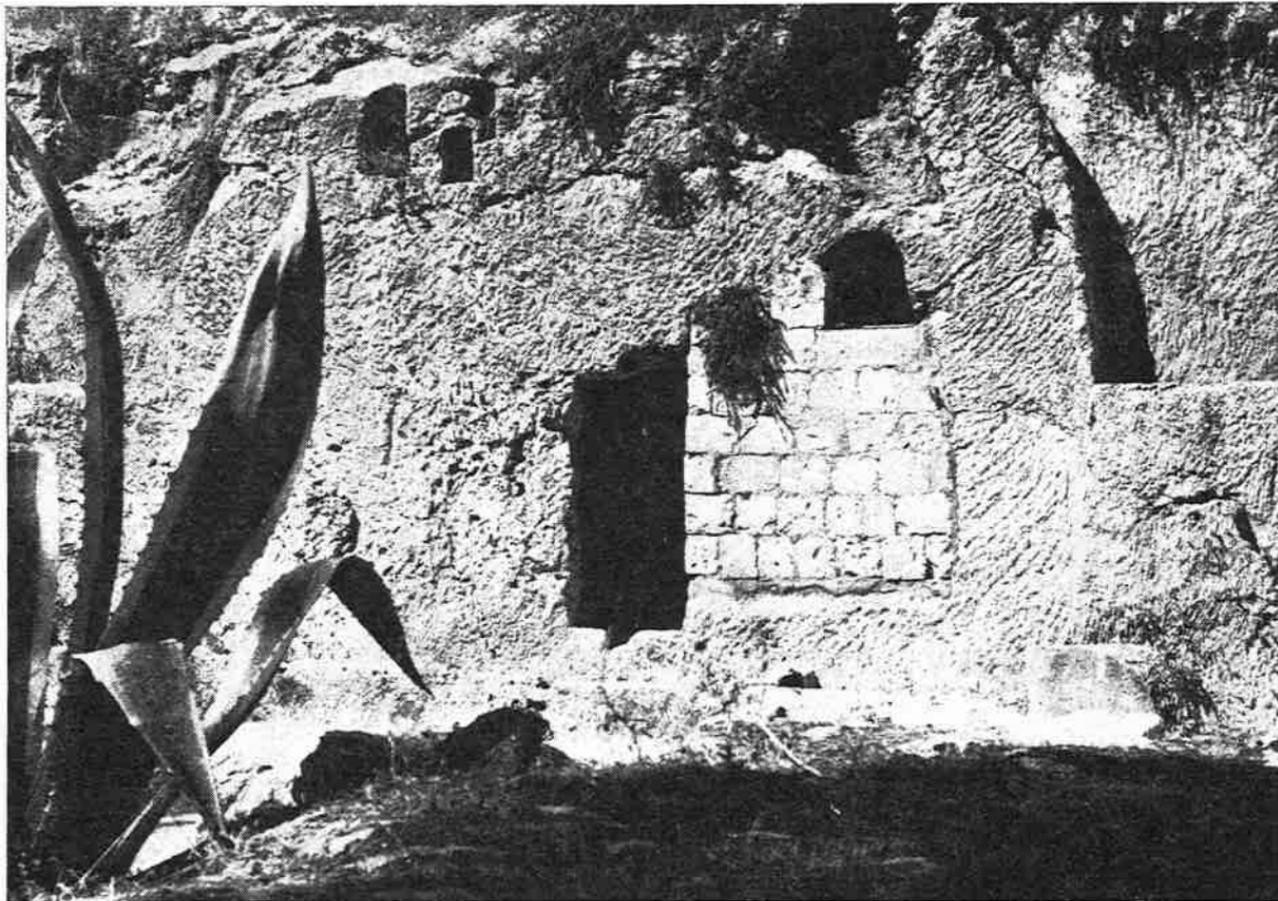
To help Thomas out of this unbelief, Christ came the second Lord's Day. He accommodates Himself many a time to our human stupidity. What saving feature Thomas manifested was that when His Lord and His God appeared there was no more argument. Immediately, he must have fallen on his knees to kow-tow to the One who is forever acknowledged as His Saviour. Let there be no more doubt in your heart, you who have followed in Thomas' tradition!

Out of Thomas' unbelief is drawn a great principle for our learning and benediction. It is ordinary blessing to believe after seeing. It is extraordinary blessing to believe without seeing. Thus we who have not seen the Lord with eyes of flesh but have believed are no less, yea more, blessed than those who have seen. For to take Him at His Word, we do Him double honour, and receive a corresponding benediction. O Lord, grant us more faith, to believe in Thyself and in Thy Almighty Power. With Thee nothing is impossible. Let's hear again Peter's blessing to Christians under trial but who stand steadfast because they are trusting in a living Saviour: "Whom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Pet 1:8).

As to doubting Thomas, he became Thomas the Doughty, Apostle to India. According to tradition, he established seven churches in South India and was martyred near Madras. Another tradition said he went even to China. The great numbers of Thomas Christians in India substantiate the tradition.



Golgotha, or Calvary, "the place of a skull" (Lk.23:33).



The Garden Tomb, Jerusalem. "He is not here, but is risen." (Lk. 24:6.)

**To His flock and undershepherds,
Jesus Christ is that great Shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Amen.**

This very last chapter in John is an Epilogue. According to Webster, an epilogue is "a closing section added to a novel, play, etc., providing further comment, interpretation, or information." But why is it added after John's Gospel is concluded with such a beautiful climax at Jn. 20:30, 31?

According to Hendriksen there is a sevenfold purpose:

1. To prove that the risen Christ still takes an interest in His Church, and that His power and love have not diminished in any way.
2. To remind the disciples to be fishers always of men.
3. To show Peter, despite his grievous sin of denying the Saviour, he has been re-instated. What is remembered by man is forgotten by God, because God's forgiveness is divine.
4. To stress once again the comforting truth of predestination, inasmuch as Peter's glorious death has been foreseen and predicted (See 21:18, 19).
5. To remove a misunderstanding in respect of Jesus' saying about John that he was not going to die (21:23).
6. To allow the Ephesian elders to present the united testimony to the reliability of John's Gospel record.
7. To explain why so many other events in the life of Christ were not recorded (21:25).

Whatever other purpose for penning this Epilogue, the fact that it is John's personal experience and eye-witness account makes it throb with life. How do you know that John was there that "third" Resurrection morning?

Fruitless Enterprises Without Christ

The sea of Tiberias is the sea of Galilee, the old haunt of the disciples. The disciples had returned to their homes in Galilee to keep an appointment with the Lord (Matt 28:10). As they were first called in Galilee, so should they be commissioned from Galilee.

While they waited for the Lord, Peter, captain of the team, suggested to go fishing. Not fishing for pleasure, but for livelihood. "... if any would not work neither should he eat" (I Thess 3:10). Should the apostles be farmers, they would be digging in the field. They were no "rice-tubs", sitting down, like lazy monks, to be fed. They were no eaters of the bread of idleness. Work is sacred and honourable.

Be that as it may, self enterprise needs God's help to succeed. As the Lord was not present, and this fishing expedition was launched rather at Peter's own initiative, the Lord wanted them to learn again that previous lesson (Lk 5) of fruitless self-effort. The Lord also wanted to assure His very own of His ever present help in time of need. For soon He would return physically to Heaven, but He would go through life with them as their Provider. There is the higher purpose of God in the affairs of His children in withholding or releasing. So the story is abruptly told in one verse, with an abrupt ending — "and that night they caught nothing" (v. 3). Is that your experience also?

In Church work there are those who like to sweat through with fairs and sales, walkathons and flags, concerts and musicales. But when the Lord promotes His own work, He will need none of our self-efforts, that all glory should redound only to Himself.

Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow Me."

Fruitful Service Under Christ's Direction

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not it was Jesus” (v. 4). How often, in our blind struggles, we are under the watchful eyes of our Saviour, but we know not He is there. When we are at the end of our tether, then comes our Saviour to help. The disciples were wet and cold with hunger but the Lord had a hot meal waiting for them. He knows our every need. He provides like a mother her children before they ask.

But He had greater blessings in store for them if they would follow His direction. “Cast the net on the right side of the ship” This they did after they had failed, casting on the wrong side! And what a catch, 153 **great** fishes. How “great” they were we’re not told, but if they were 10 or 20 pounders, an average of 15 pounds per fish, the reaping of this fruitful service would exceed 2,000 pounds or over 1,000 kilos. At \$3.00 per kilo of fresh fish, the instant catch they made would be worth over \$3,000. How many meals would \$3,000 buy for the seven of them?

When God so blesses the work of their hands, the disciples also have their eyes opened: “It is the Lord.” When God blesses the work of our hands, our Church, do we give glory to Him and say, “It is the Lord”? And when we say this, it expresses our gratitude to the Giver than our joy in the gift. It consecrates us to ever more loving service to Him, and not to our own whims and fancies, our own strength and prowess. Compare this chapter with Luke 5 in which Peter, overwhelmed by the love and power of his Lord, confessed his sins. His self-service was sinful being out of the Lord’s direction, according to his own confession. Should we not re-examine ourselves trying to serve God in our wilful ways?

This is the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples as a group, the first two times being in Jerusalem, the first Sunday evening, without Thomas, and the second Sunday evening, with Thomas.

J.C. Ryle comments: "We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, the different characters of different disciples of Christ. Once more, on this deeply interesting occasion, we see Peter and John side by side in the same boat, and once more, as at the sepulchre, we see these two good men behaving in different ways. When Jesus stood on the shore, in the dim twilight of the morning, John was the first to perceive who it was, and to say, "It is the Lord;" but Peter was the first to spring into the water and to struggle to get close to his Master. In a word, John was the first to see; but Peter was the first to act. John's gentle loving spirit was quickest to discern; but Peter's fiery, impulsive nature was quickest to stir and move. And yet both were believers, both were true-hearted disciples, both loved the Lord in life, and were faithful to Him unto death. But their natural temperaments were not the same.

Let us never forget the practical lesson before us. As long as we live, let us diligently use it in forming our estimate of believers. Let us not condemn others as graceless and unconverted, because they do not see the path of duty from our stand-point, or feel things exactly as we feel them. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." (I Cor xii 4). The gifts of God's children are not bestowed precisely in the same measure and degree. Some have more of one gift, and some have more of another. Some have gifts which shine more in public, and some which shine more in private. Some are more bright in a passive life, and some are more bright in an active one. Yet each and all the members of God's family, in their own way and in their own season, bring glory to God. Martha was "careful and troubled about much serving," when Mary "sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word." Yet there came a day at Bethany when Mary was crushed and prostrated by overmuch sorrow, and Martha's faith shone more brightly than her sister's. (Luke x. 39; John xi. 20-28) Nevertheless both were loved by our Lord. The one thing needful is to have the grace of the Spirit and to love Christ. Let us love all of whom this can be said, though they may not see with our eyes in everything. The Church of Christ needs servants of all kinds, and instruments of every sort; penknives as well as swords, axes as well as hammers, chisels as well as saws, Marthas as well as Marys, Peters as well as Johns. Let our ruling maxim be this, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Eph. vi. 24).

Between Jesus and Peter

Many commentators say that the reason why Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him is in his three denials. And the reason why Jesus wants an answer to each question is to find out how much Peter loves his Lord.

James Stalker in *Christian World Pulpit* mentions three "storeys" of Peter's love for the Saviour. In the house of Life of each of us there are three storeys—the basement, the middle storey, the top floor.

The basement represents our feelings. There are in us many feelings of very different kinds that all pass by the general name of love. Among all the kinds of love that your heart has known, has love to Christ been one?

From the basement, Christ comes up the middle storey which is Intelligence. He wants our choice of Him to spring not only from emotion, but from judgement as well. Knowledge deepens our love of Christ. It increases our gratitude to Him.

From the middle storey of Intellect He ascends the top floor of Will. Now there are two types of love in this world, the love that receives and the love that gives. The love that receives absorbs its object and enjoys it. The love that gives is absorbed in its object and forgets itself. Our love to Christ must be submitted to the test. Does our love to Christ entail disadvantage and self-denial? If we love Him are we willing to take up the cross and follow Him? To be nothing that He may be All in all?

Why does our Lord demand such love? Because He first loved us, to the extent of dying on the cross for our sins. The utmost demand from our Lord on Peter reflects Jesus' greater love for him, and for us. And if we truly love Him, we must feed His lambs and sheep as He commands. If we love Him, we must serve Him in His Church. J.C. Ryle: "True love to Christ is chiefly to be seen in usefulness to others, in doing as Christ did, in walking in His steps, in labouring to do good in this bad world. He that talks of loving Christ, and idles through life, never trying to do good to others, is deceiving himself, and will find at length that he had better never been born."

Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thy obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.

“The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

V. 18 is a prediction of our Lord of the manner of the Apostle's death. This prophecy was fulfilled when Peter was crucified a martyr for Christ's sake.

Normally there is a veil drawn between us and the future. To obtain fore-knowledge of things to come, in most cases, says J.C. Ryle, would be a sorrowful possession. To know of evil going to befall us, and yet not able to prevent it, would make us simply miserable. Hence not only God withholds knowledge of the future from us, but also forbids us to try to unravel it through the help of mediums (Deut. 18:9-14).

But to the Apostle Peter, Christ has revealed how he should die for Him. This He has done because He knows he can take it. He knows this knowledge will be beneficial to him. That he and we will learn that our whole future is known and pre-arranged by God. There is no such thing as luck, chance or accident in the journey of life. Everything from beginning to end is foreseen, predestined by One who is too wise to err and too loving to do us harm.

J.C. Ryle says: Let us store up this truth in our minds, and use it diligently in all the days of darkness through which we may yet have to pass. In such days we should lean back on the thought, “Christ knows this, and knew it when He called me to be His disciple.” It is foolish to repine and murmur over troubles of those whom we love. We should fall back rather on the thought that all is well done. It is useless to fret and be rebellious, when we ourselves have bitter cups to drink. We should rather say, “This is also from the Lord: He foresaw it, and would have prevented it, if it had not been for my good.”

“We learn secondly that a believer's death is intended to glorify God. . . . We may die to the Lord as well as live to the Lord. Like Samson we may do more for God in our death than we ever did in our lives. . . .”

How true is the saying by Tertullian: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

John not immortal but Jesus is!

After our Lord had conferred the martyr's crown on Peter, the chief of apostles was curious to know John's future. Calvin says, "We have in Peter an instance of our not merely superfluous but even harmful curiosity, that we are drawn away from our duty by looking at others." As the saying goes "to compare is odious", we should heed what is given as a gentle admonition by our Lord in reply to Peter. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (v. 22). What is God's plan for your life? What is His holy will that should consume you like fire charcoal? Let your whole being be given up to do His bidding. In Paul's words, "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12). Let us learn from Paul to "pursue" Christ.

Out of Christ's cryptic saying, "If I will that he tarry till I come" there went about a rumour that John was the one promised immortality by our Lord. This was an erroneous notion, perhaps circulating on the whispering lips of John's own congregation at Ephesus. A fable was spread of John how he ordered a grave to be dug for him and went into it, and the next day it was found empty! In this Epilogue the Apostle John once for all explodes the myth that was beginning to be spread about him.

There is one truly Immortal, the Risen Saviour who dined with them that early morning. His Immortality is made the more Immortal by the records made of his Life which "if they should be written everyone, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." May you, dear Reader, find life, life everlasting, life more abundant by going over and over again this Gospel of Life!

Sing them over again to me, Wonderful words of life;
Let me more of the beauty see, Wonderful words of life;
Words of life and beauty, Teach me faith and duty;
Beautiful words, wonderful words, Wonderful words of life,
Beautiful words, wonderful words, Wonderful words of life.

The Epistles of Life

Although John's name is not mentioned in these three Epistles which are attributed to him, "There are such close affinities with the Fourth Gospel in style and subject matter that most scholars agree that the four writings are from the same hand" (New Bible Commentary).

And inasmuch as the Fourth Gospel is written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name" (John 20:31), these Epistles are written "unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (I John 5:13). As we have called John's Gospel the Gospel of Life, so are we led to call these companion writings the Epistles of Life. What in the whole world can compare with life? "For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Luke 9:25). The Gospel of Life is to lead you into Life. The Epistles of Life are to establish you in the Life, that you might not merely hope for Salvation but know for sure you have it. These Epistles are Doctrines of Everlasting Life.

The Epistles are a further extension of the Gospel in that they are an exposition of the Gospel and a defence of the Gospel. For the early Church was already under attack of the evil one, the spirit of antichrist, through heresies and worldly philosophies, so that schisms began to hurt the unity of the Church. (1 John 2:19). While these Epistles are a strong refutation of the erroneous claims of Gnosticism, that salvation comes through initiation into their system of "knowledge", which denies an incarnate Christ, positively, they teach righteousness of life, brotherly love, and faith in Jesus, God in the flesh. God is love and God is light, but God is above all our Heavenly Father and we His little children. And we should seek Him and keep ourselves from idols!

Words of Life and beauty. Teach me faith and duty,
Wonderful words of Life.

The Life Eternal in God Revealed to Men

How similarly does the Apostle commence this Epistle as he with the Gospel. "The beginning" that is mentioned here is the same as "the beginning" of John 1:1, ages upon ages before "the beginning" of Genesis 1:1 when God created the universe.

That which was from the beginning, says Calvin, refers to the deity of Christ, His divine nature, which was with God. From all eternity, that beginning that had no beginning!

John testifies to his and the other apostles' coming into contact with the Deity, Who has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2) so that we have "heard, and seen with our eyes, and which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." How this statement reflects what John had written earlier "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."

For three-and-a-half years John and the other apostles had lived together with our Lord, walked and talked together as they went about Judea preaching, teaching and healing. They believed with all their hearts Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. While the bulk of Jesus' audience left Him because of unbelief, the apostles stuck with Him through thick and thin. When Jesus tested them after the Feeding of the Five Thousand, if they would also go away, Peter answered "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God" (John 6:68, 69). Can you say that of Jesus Christ?

In the Gospel Christ is called the Word. Here He is called the Word of Life or the Lively Word, inasmuch as it is declared earlier "in Him was life." Jesus is the Word of Life because He has poured out His life on all creatures, and now He restores life in us who had perished, dead in Adam's sin. (Calvin).

Life in Christian Fellowship

In John 1:12, 13 the Apostle says "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

It is those who are born again, who have received Christ as Saviour and become children of God that begin to live a new life. This new life, in its relationship with one another, between God and men, between Christian and Christian is called fellowship. This fellowship is unique to Christianity. It is above the comradeship that Communists and socialists talk about, the friendship that brings together people of the same mind on a worldly plane.

For Christian fellowship must relate to the Father and the Son, through the Son to the Father. There must first be that vertical relationship before there can be the horizontal relationship. It is a life, an organism, not an organisation, like a tree and not a wooden structure.

The Apostle is here revealing to new believers the treasures of Christian fellowship. "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." (I Jn 1:4). He is telling us, "Isn't it wonderful that we are become sons and daughters of God, members of the same family of God, that we have close contact with God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ?" John further wants to assure any new Christian of the fellowship the Church would extend to them when they have truly believed.

Have you not experienced this new spiritual relationship that is deeper and sweeter than that on the natural plane? Spiritual brothers and sisters are closer with one another than brothers and sisters in the flesh . . . "and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).

Behold, how good and how pleasant,
When brethren dwell in peace
What heavenly sweetness and fragrance
This Christian Unity.
How gracious is the Saviour's love
That binds our hearts in one:
It rains like Hermon's dew above
Upon the hills of Zion.

Light in Christian Fellowship

As in John 1 where Jesus Christ was introduced as Light after He was declared the source of life, so the Apostle presents Him in the same order. The Word of Life is here advanced as "God is Light".

As God is light, Christian fellowship whether on the vertical line or horizontal plane must be practised in the light. Christian fellowship cannot be practised in darkness because that is an impossibility. Shine a torch into a dark dungeon, and what happens? Darkness vanishes! If what is called Christian fellowship is practised in darkness, or shades of darkness, it is then no Christian fellowship at all. It is a lie. It is not the truth. What a lesson is given to the whole Church, from pastor to elder, to deacon, to every member.

As the Church is a visible organisation it is encumbered with many infirmities. Oftentimes gossip takes the place of Gospel. Smokescreens are spread as a result. Light is impeded by darkness, by mists and fogs.

But the Church need not flounder in such murky situations. If darkness begins to invade the Church, there is a way out of the maze if we take the steps of reconciliation laid down by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17. Altogether there are four steps to get us out of darkness:

1. A private meeting between you and your brother alone.
2. If this fails bring one or two more as witnesses.
3. If this further fails bring it before the pastor and session.
4. If this still cannot work, then he becomes as an outsider. The fellowship is severed. The knot not being able to be untied must be cut.

If it works, in any of the first three steps, fellowship is restored in mutual forgiveness in Jesus Christ (v. 7).

An Unrepentant Heart is a Dark Heart

Under the searchlight of the God of Light, no matter how pure and holy a life we've lived, we can only say like Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). How much more when we get involved with a brother in some altercation, no matter how trivial.

It will not do to crow over one's righteousness. We should not always point the finger at others, at the brother with whom we are in dispute. This is what the Apostle means when he says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

But the repentant heart is always acceptable before God: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalms 51:17). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Therefore the brother who rejects reconciliation to the fourth "degree" because he thinks he is all pure is tantamount to saying, God is a liar! But His word is not in him. He has in fact repudiated God, not man! His adamant heart being a closed heart is a dark heart.

Is our Christian fellowship sincere? The things we say of others behind their backs dare we say in front of them? A word from Solomon: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6). Memorise!

Of the Twelve Apostles who was the one with a dark heart?

The Law of Fellowship

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Christian fellowship can be spoilt by sin in just one of its members. To maintain this fellowship certain principles are laid down which we abbreviate under the word "law".

1. Between members of the Church and the Head of the Church, there stands Jesus Christ, the Advocate, to plead our cause, who also becomes the propitiation for our sins.
2. Between members themselves they are to obey the commandments which are summarised under "love one another".
3. As to the world we are to refrain from loving it or lusting after it. Loving the world and loving God are mutually exclusive.
4. As to antichrists masquerading as brethren in the Church, it is essential that these be removed from the fellowship.
5. In matters of judgement the fellowship has the anointing of the Spirit to help them discern between error and truth. This anointing illuminates us from going astray.
6. Abiding in Christ is the assurance of our salvation until Christ comes again.

Let us test ourselves if we are keeping these laws of fellowship, not that by keeping them we are saved, but rather being saved these can become our keeping. Ps. 119:97-99: "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. Memorise!

Advocate for sinning members

When members of the Church fall into sin, they must come back to the Father. But only through the Advocate who alone can speak to the Father for us. An advocate, according to the Latin, is one who is called to plead for another. The Greek here which is **parakletos** is translated Comforter in Jn. 15:16, 26. Advocate is the preferred rendering here. Jesus Christ is as it were our Lawyer appearing on our behalf in the Court of God the Father-Judge to plead for us.

But the Advocate in our Saviour is far above human advocates. The latter may succeed or not succeed in the pleading. Our Lord has absolute success because He is also the propitiation, the appeasement, the atonement, the satisfaction offering by His own blood for our sins. He not only pleads with the Father to pardon us but also pays the penalty of our sins. What lawyer who goes to court will pay the fine or suffer punishment, even capital punishment, for his client?

It is interesting to observe this additional offer of propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Although the propitiation available for Christians is efficient for the elect, it is sufficient for the whole world. This offer of propitiation for the sins of the whole world bespeaks the desiderative will of God, who "is longsuffering to us—ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet 3:9). It is the John 3:16 of John's Epistles.

Never say die even when you feel so hopelessly lost, so far astray from God. Satan who is jealous of us will try to lead you to suicide. But our Lord is always merciful. He says, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "...and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" (Jn. 6:37).

Additional verse for Catholic readers: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5).

Fellowship = Obedience and Love

How do you know you are saved? And therefore enjoy the Christian fellowship? If you love Him and keep His commandments! This echoes what our Lord had spoken to the disciples in John 15, in the sermon on the True Vine.

In exhorting Christians to keep God's commandments as proof of knowledge of and fellowship with God, John mentions the importance of keeping His Word, the "old commandment," that which has come to us from Moses and the prophets. This is the Old Testament, God's Word from of old. Then why a new commandment? John recollects what our Lord had said in John 13:34. The new commandment is the practice of love, the other side of the Old Commandment. It is the law of God stated positively to complement the "Thou shalt nots" of the old commandments. The new commandment, which emphasises the out-working of love in Christian fellowship does not contradict the old, but puts it in a new light. To test whether one is walking in true fellowship, which is called light, John asks, "Do you love or hate your brother?" This is a very practical question, because it is so easy to see brothers in the same fellowship fall out. Now, what John is stressing here is for the whole church, from the youngest to the oldest, from the junior youth fellowship to the session and presbytery.

If our church is to become strong, we must practise holiness and love in our fellowship. And let us not be gossipers but rather Gospellers!

I John 2:15-17

Loving the world and loving God are mutually exclusive

In the practice of Christian fellowship is the prerequisite of loving the Father against loving the world. When a Christian begins to love the world from which he has been saved, he begins to backslide. His love of the Father cools off correspondingly.

“Love is as strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave.” (Song of Solomon 8:6) When we stray to love another more than we should, that first love is turned into jealousy in the one we first loved, and soon into hatred. God and the world stand in opposition to each other, and we can love one or the other, but not both.

By “world” we mean the world system, materialism. The world is here analysed as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Was not Eve fallen into Satan’s trap when he tempted her with these three things in the Forbidden Fruit? That it was good for food (lust of the flesh), that it was pleasant to the eyes (lust of the eyes) and “a tree to be desired to make one wise” (pride of life). Gen. 3:6.

While that Tree no more exists in its primitive form, the temptation powers of the lust of the flesh, of the eyes and of the pride of life have drawn not a few Christians back into the world. Why is so and so no more in church? Because he is more busy making money on the Lord’s Day. Because he has left his wife and run off with another. These are sad stories but true. So, flee every lust, no matter how small it appears to be. But love the Lord with all your heart and strength.

Take time to be holy, Speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, And feed on His Word:
Make friends of God’s children; Help those who are weak;
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Antichrists have come!

The word "antichrist" is used only by John in the Epistles but the idea behind it is widespread. John assumes his readers to know of a coming Antichrist in the endtimes, but since there have arisen many in his fellowship, many who deny the doctrine of Christ, he observes these apostates to be heralds of the One to come. "Anti," translated "enemy" in Chinese, is a stronger term than "false". It refers to what Paul denominates as that Wicked, Man of Sin, Son of Perdition. In Revelation he is called the Beast.

What are the characteristics of an antichrist? These are given further in I Jn 4:3; II Jn 7.

As oil and water do not mix, those in a Christian fellowship who have not the Spirit of Christ, but rather an antichrist spirit, will come to a show down with the fellowship, sooner or later. "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Lk 11:23).

Warning the flock against enemies of the Good Shepherd is part and parcel of the apostolic ministry. While John points out the antichrists formerly hidden in the fellowship, Peter cries out against "false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (II Pet 2:1). Paul describes these as "enemies of the cross of Christ . . . whose God is their belly" (Phil 3:18, 19), while Calvin adds to the condemnation, "whose religion is their kitchen."

Why do enemies of Christ try to serve Christ in the Church? For selfish gain, power and fame. Dr Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury whose antichrist views are well known to the world, who refutes the One Way of Salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, is a modern example of an antichrist spirit. The Pope is another, according to the Reformers. Beware of antichrists!

To guide the Church into all Truth, Christ promised to send the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16:13). This same Spirit is here called the Holy One who gives us an "unction" (v. 20) or "anointing" (v. 27), which in theological language is called "illumination". From the anointing of the Holy Spirit we have light from above that enables us to discern the spirit of falsehood, of error and of heresy. From this anointing we know who has an antichrist spirit, even he who denies the Son, and the Father and the Son together.

Belief in Jesus Christ is spelled out clearly in God's Word to include the doctrine of Jesus Christ (11 John 9). Christ's virgin birth and sinless full humanity are basic to the doctrine of Christ. Other equally fundamental teachings in the doctrine of Christ are His substitutionary atonement (He died in order to pay for the penalty of our sins), His miracles, His bodily resurrection and personal, visible coming again. When over 1,000 pastors of the Presbyterian Church in USA in 1923 denied the above-mentioned essentials of the doctrine of Christ, what is your judgement on the matter? Do you have that higher discernment from Holy Anointing to pronounce a verdict?

Being given this higher discernment from the anointing of the Holy Spirit we can see through every hypocrisy of teaching from the Evil One. We have no qualms to call, in John's words, every denier of Christ a liar (v. 22). Those who keep the Truth which they had received from the beginning, on the other hand, are promised eternal life. And they shall be kept from them that try to seduce, i.e., to lead astray. The study of doctrine is a must for every Church member.

Abiding in Christ is Assurance

One cornerstone of the doctrine of our salvation is eternal security, that is, once you are saved, you will continue to be saved to the very end. John learned this doctrine in John 10 where Jesus talks of giving the sheep eternal life. (Jn 10:28, 29).

But eternal security is not a one way street. There is the other aspect of a saved soul "abiding in Christ". After we are saved, we do not take a nonchalant attitude to righteous living. We are exhorted henceforth to live as God would want us to live: Righteous living, holy living, a life more abundantly (Jn 10:10). But this cannot be done in our own strength. We must "abide in him" (1 Jn 2:28) which is another reflection of the sermon on the True Vine. And, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn 10:6).

Eternal security never grants licence to live a life of sinful pleasure. That is called "antinomianism" which God hates. He who lives a holy life can feel secure when Christ comes. He who cuts himself off from the Lord, from the Church, can only feel insecure at His coming, to say the least. Are you living for Christ or for self?

Sons of God should live like Sons of God

Calvin has made a graphic statement on our new relationship with God through the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ: "The Son of God became the Son of man that the sons of men might become the sons of God." Yes, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, for Christ's sake, that we should be called the sons of God. Our elevated dignity in Christ is unknown to the world.

But we should know ourselves! We shall be changed to be like Christ at His Second Coming. And we who have the blessed hope of seeing Him must live a holy life because that's the essence of the new life in Christ, as sons of God. Are you?

Having this hope in Him, we "abide in Him." This "abiding in Him" gives us power to live a life from sin. We have a power in us not to sin. Conversely, those who think they are Christians are never sons of God who live in sin. Rather, they are sons of the devil.

So the test of whether you are a son or daughter of God or of the devil is whether you have been born again, born into God's family; whether you have been conferred this high dignity of being sons (daughters) of God by the new relationship created in us by Christ.

How this first part of chapter 3 reflects the first part of the 3rd chapter of John's Gospel where our Lord spoke solemnly to Nicodemus of the need of the new birth. It is not enough to be born into a Christian family, to be brought up in Sunday School and Church, to join the Youth Fellowship, to re-affirm one's faith and take the Lord's Supper. In the words of St Paul, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (II Cor 13:5) If you are born again, become a son or daughter of God, you know it. If you do not know, is it because you are a reprobate, one hardened in sin, cast off by God?

How sons of God should treat one another

The moment we are born into God's family we become not only related vertically with our Heavenly Father but also, horizontally, with others who are born again. A Christian cannot live to himself like a hermit! Christians are members one of another, like the branches of a tree.

Christians should love one another. One Church member cannot hate another. If he does he is like Cain who murdered Abel. To hate a brother in the Lord is to commit the sin of murder, to commit a sin that deprives him of his own life! If God so loved us as to send His son to die for us, we have a duty to sacrifice for our brother. How? In a practical way, to help the needy ones with deeds of mercy. With money, with food and clothing. How often we drive away those whom we should help because of selfishness, and do not our hearts condemn us?

But if we are mindful of the needs of the poor, and we do practise charity consistently, then when we become needy ourselves, God will treat us as we treat them. Giving alms to the needy pleases God.

However it is not by giving charity that a person earns his salvation, as the world so often thinks. It is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, and proof of that salvation is loving one another. In loving other Christians we experience Christ living in us by His Spirit. Like the healthy branches of a tree experience the sap flowing through them from the tree trunk, infusing every part of the tree. Remember the sermon on the True Vine (John 15)? Do you experience the joy of Christian fellowship? Or do you shrink from your brother or sister, because of hatred in your heart?

I John 4:1

One missing link in the Apostolic succession!

Many churches claim to be in the apostolic succession! No. 1 is the Roman Catholic Church, by virtue of the keys given to St. Peter. There are Pentecostal churches who claim to be apostolic, and even cultic churches.

If a church claims to be apostolic, that church must be true not only to the doctrines of the apostles, but also to their commitment to the ministry of warning. Warning against false teachers, false prophets, false Christs, false apostles, false brethren and false spirits.

Christ our Lord of course has plenty to say against these false ones. But if you read the Epistles you will find whether it be Paul or Peter, John or Jude, they also sound constant warnings against the false.

Insofar as John is concerned, we have noted the antichrists he had put his finger on in I Jn 2:18-19. In I Jn 4:1, the Apostle warns against false prophets and false spirits. A prophet is a spokesman for One who sends him forth to speak. Does he speak from the Spirit of Truth or of error? Some may be sincerely misguided, like young people deluded by sects such as Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Moonies. Worst of all are the self-deluded liberal and modernist professors of theological colleges and seminaries. What they say cannot be believed if they conform not to the Holy Scriptures.

When, for example, a Moonie leader came to visit our Church to sell his brand of Christianity of the Unification Church, we asked him one test question, "Do you believe Jesus Christ the Son of God is Virgin-born?" When the answer was no, the false spirit was exposed! Test them by the doctrines of Jesus Christ!

The trouble with many churches today is, many not only do not warn against false prophets and spirits, they are carried away by them! One missing link in the apostolic succession!

What brand of false spirit is this?

The false spirit that John condemns here has denied the humanity of Christ. Christ is fully God and fully man in one Person, the God-man, God's Son becoming Man that He might bring men to the Father. That is what is meant by "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." That Christ is Man is as important as Christ is God.

The false spirit mentioned here belongs to a cult called Docetists, a branch of the Gnostics which "held that Christ had no real body or human soul. His earthly manifestation in human form was a phantasm, a mere appearance without substance or reality. Hence they were called Docetists from the Greek verb **dokeo**, which means to appear, to seem to be. Christ's whole earthly life was an illusion. He was not born. Nor did He suffer. (Hodge).

Such a spirit is not only false, but antichrist. It came into the world in John's time. Although the Antichrist is a personage of Wickedness, Christians need not fear him because "greater is he that is in you that he that is in the world." We are victorious over every evil force. As light over darkness!

How do you diagnose false spirits? They can be seen through in their falsehood. When they speak, they so speak that the world is attracted to them. They play on the psychology of the masses. For example, Dr Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, says in the Straits Times that were he born in New Delhi he would be Hindu, and Muslim were he born in Iran. By pandering to the ego of different religious groups, he gains a "majority vote" of popularity. But he is a false prophet.

Another way of knowing false spirits is from their reaction to teaching of Truth. False teachers will not submit to Truth.

The Cross, a perfect symbol of love

From v. 7 to v. 10 there is seen the vertical dimension. The love of God that sent His only begotten Son into the world to bring us out of death into life. The vertical line moves from top to bottom, “not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (v. 10) Have you experienced this love from above?

From v. 11 to v. 21 there is seen the horizontal dimension. The love of God that intersects the horizontal line transfuses His love in us and through us. If God loves us we should love one another. (v. 11) Love spreading from the vertical into the horizontal is “perfected” in us. For God dwells with those that love one another and confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God, because it is by His cross we are reconciled to Him. Such love of God indwelling us shields us from fear of the Judgement. The importance of loving our brother cannot be over emphasised. For it is repeated by the Apostle John in his Epistles time and time again.

Why? Because love is the greatest motivating power in Church work. Read I Cor 13. Therefore it is not by miracles, signs and wonders, dreams, visions and gift of tongues, not even preaching and high theological qualifications, etc. Love is the greatest, love that is manifested by the Cross of Christ.

All my heart to Him I give,
Ever to Him I cling
In His blessed presence live
Ever His praises sing
Love so mighty and so true
Merits my soul's best songs;
Faithful, loving service too, To Him belongs
Love lifted me, love lifted me,
When nothing else could help, love lifted me.

Victory by faith in Jesus the Christ

The Apostle of Love is also the Apostle of Faith. John wrote the fourth Gospel in order that we might believe and now he writes this Epistle to us who believe... Love is a daughter of Faith, for unless we have believed in Jesus Christ how can we love His Father and God's children, and how can we lovingly obey His commandments?

But faith which the world talks about with no reference to Christ is no faith at all. The world's faith is an anchor without a chain. Faith that John declares is overcoming faith, anchored securely in Jesus Christ with a chain that reaches to the Rock. Which type of faith is yours?

Now, in view of false spirits having tried to explain Christ away, some saying that He was not a Man but an illusion of a Man (they denied He came in the flesh), John is constrained here to witness how Jesus is the true Saviour. Inasmuch as it is John who witnessed to the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' riven side (John 19:34, 35), he now declares "that Christ's side was a fountain of blood and water, so that believers might know that the true cleansing, of which the ancient baptisms were figures is in Him. And that they might also know that then was fulfilled what all the sprinklings of blood formerly promised." (Calvin). The Spirit of Truth is He who makes believers feel this cleansing power of Christ. (Jn 3 talks of how the Spirit causes us to be born again by looking to the crucified Saviour).

V. 7 is disputed by marginal notes and omitted by RSV, but Calvin would not dare question it, since it is found "in the best and most approved" copies. God, to confirm our faith in Christ most abundantly testifies in a threefold way that we should rest in Him. As the Spirit has witnessed to the power of the water and blood in Christ on earth, so from Heaven we have the threefold testimony of the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost. (The Trinity was manifested from Heaven at Jesus' baptism. Matt 3:16, 17).

The argument of the crisp couplet at v. 12, therefore, speaks for itself.

I John 5:13-21

Those who believe Christ also know (knowledge is power)

We have noted those of the world who talk about an anchorless faith, but ours is secure in the Rock Christ. Moreover, our faith is fortified with knowledge. Do you **know** you **are** saved? If you are trusting in Christ, you should answer a sure yes. That's what John means by v. 13.

That knowledge also gives us confidence in our prayers and assurance of His answer. That knowledge helps us to ask "for nothing from God that we do not obtain." (Calvin) i.e. we ask in His will.

That knowledge should lead us to mutual concern for sinning brothers. God hears our prayers for erring ones in the Church, and God will restore them because, having been born into God's family, they should not perish. This is the ministry of intercessory prayer which we so much lack. But, with regard to apostates, reprobates, heretics, who know the Truth and yet reject it, they are destined for destruction. John does not require us to pray for these. Paul says, "an heretick after the first and second admonition reject" (Tit 3:10).

"All wrongdoing is sin. We must not take sin lightly. But the believer may sin a sin which does not remove him from the category of the saved" (New Bible Commentary).

That knowledge tells us we should not sin habitually who are born again. We have power not to sin because we are of God. In contrast, the whole world lies under Satan's sway. That knowledge in the incarnation of Christ, the coming of the Saviour in human form—this is the Truth, is eternal life.

Such knowledge truly gives us power to live a godly life. Such knowledge becomes the backbone of our faith. Such knowledge gives us eternal security.

II John

The Apostle of Love is also the Elder of Truth

Though the name of John does not appear here nor is his apostleship stated, the Epistle's contents convince the Church to receive this as from the Apostle. It is written to "the elect lady and her children," and that reflects on the numbers of holy women who have served the Lord with their household. In the N.T. there's Lydia, there's Priscilla, who are well known.

As love in Christian fellowship is a theme of John to the Church, which commands our obedience to God, so are we to dwell in the truth (truth occurs 5 times in the first 4 verses).

The Truth John has in mind here is revealed in v. 9 to be the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ comprehends not only His deity but humanity, that He is both God and Man, the God-man. In John's day, the antichrist spirit denied the true human nature of Christ, making Him to be some illusive phantom. This transgression of the doctrine of Christ makes it impossible for Christians to have fellowship with purveyors of this heresy. To have fellowship with such is to be involved in their "evil deeds".

By application, this injunction of John should exclude us from fellowship with those who deny the virgin birth, substitutory atonement, miracles and bodily resurrection. In 1923 there were 1294 U.S.A. Presbyterian pastors who signed a document called the Auburn Affirmation in which they denied the above-stated 4 fundamentals plus the inerrancy and infallibility of Holy Scripture. Do you think they can remain ministers of Christ or should they be expelled? Dr Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, is against those who "make extravagant claims for one faith." This repudiates Jesus' claim to the only Way of salvation. Do you think Anglicans should serve under him, or renounce his heresy? John says, "For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds."

If you agree with John, then why don't you speak up?

The Elder of Truth Commends Fellowhelpers to the Truth

In a day when falsehood rides high, and heretical doctrines spoil the faith of untaught Christians, there needs to be a rallying together of sons of truth for the cause of Truth.

The Elder of Truth commends Gaius because he stands with the Truth, and so does he commend "my children". The Elder of Truth advances from safeguarding the Truth to promotion of the Truth. John is delighted to hear of the Christian hospitality given by Gaius to itinerant evangelists, known or unknown to him. As these Gospel preachers travelled from place to place to evangelise the Gentiles, they needed rest and succour which Gaius liberally provided. For this Christian grace Gaius is commended a Fellow-helper to the Truth. What a degree of honour! Gaius is not Fellow of some Royal College or Academy, but one helping the Truth, which is great in God's sight. The ministry of hospitality is a rare one in these days of economic rat race. But if we offer it for truth's sake, God highly commends us. Are you a Gaius, a Lydia or a Priscilla?

Conversely, those who resist the messengers of Truth, like Diotrephes, and even restrain and expel other Christians for caring of the brethren, and in this case John is included, they will be reckoned with! Let us follow after good, not evil.

As Diotrephes is mentioned by name, so is Demetrius, but with the Elder's good commendations. How are we rated by God's servants? What is our reputation in the Church of God? Are you known for power and riches or is your name fragrantly mentioned in the cause of Truth?

"For we can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth." Who said this? Where? Memorise!

Make sure of Truth,
And Truth will make thee sure;
It will not shift nor fade nor die,
But like the heav'ns endure.

John's Christmas Greeting to You from his First Epistle

Today is Christmas! But what is Christmas? To many it is the year's biggest holiday season when people fill themselves up with big feasts, and go on a buying spree. To the Chinese, Christmas might mean the birthday of Santa Claus, founder of departmental stores!

Chambers dictionary defines Christmas as an annual festival, originally, a mass in memory of the birth of Christ, held on the 25th of December.

Though there are some who object to the celebration of Christmas because it is not commanded in the Bible and because it has been abused, and Dec. 25 is a date that cannot be verified, nevertheless, it is a blessing to commemorate the Birth of our Saviour if we do so worshipfully and meaningfully.

We note here that the Birth of Christ is described in detail by Matthew and Luke. John who writes from a different angle from Matthew and Luke simply declares the coming of the Saviour as the personal message from God to a world perishing without God. In I Jn 5:20 John has a Christmas message to us. He declares that Jesus is the Son of God. As Christians, we should know this, and not be like the ignorant ones in the world, as exemplified above. This knowledge of the birth of the Saviour should lead us to Him who is true, through Jesus Christ the Son of the True One. Jesus Christ Himself is the True God and Eternal Life. Do you know this? Do you celebrate Christmas with a thankful heart that Christ's coming into the world is for the purpose of saving you, son of death, to life eternal in Him?

For RPG readers may we express in the following pages our worship of the new born Saviour in two new Christmas carols we've penned while in the Holy Land.

O BETHLEHEM

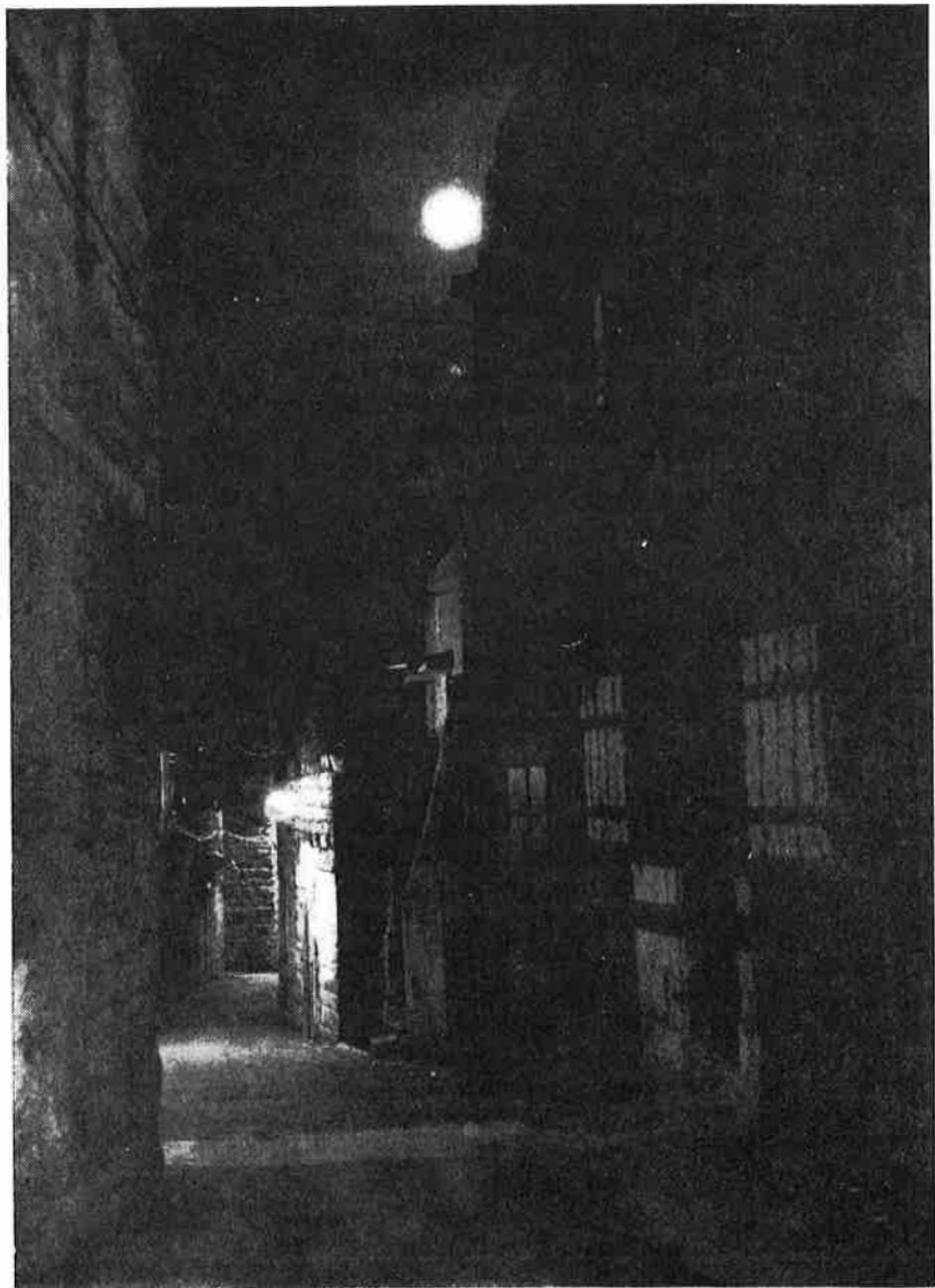
(To the tune of "O Christmas Tree,")

O Bethlehem, O Bethlehem,
Thou David's City Royal!
From days of yore thou art the same:
Thy olive hills and flowers;
Thy rolling fields of barley sweet,
Thy narrow lanes with busy feet,
Resound with wondrous tales of old
The sacred pages unfold.

O Bethlehem, O Bethlehem,
Thou City of Our Saviour!
Christ was born from the Virgin young,
So forlorn in a manger.
But angels rent the midnight sky,
With song of praise to the Most High,
While shepherds quaked in reverent fear,
To the first Christmas Noel.

O Bethlehem, O Bethlehem,
Thou City of the Pilgrims!
Two thousand years thou art the same:
Thy church tow'rs and bells pealing.
O that the angels' song of praise
Thy sons with one accord would raise;
The glad news of God's saving plan
Re-echo from land to land!

O Bethlehem, O Bethlehem,
Thou City of All Mankind!
From year to year be thou the same:
Jesus thy Saviour and mine.
Peal on the good tidings of Peace,
Peal forth the Divine Amnesty,
From Christmas Day to Christmas Day,
And Earth shall sing Emmanuel!



"Winter Moon."

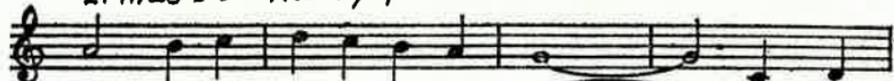
Winter Moon

Tune of "WHITE CHRISTMAS"

T. Tow



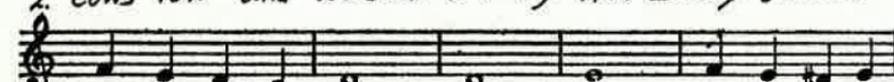
3 - - - | 4 3 #2 3 | 4 - - - | #4 5 . - . |
 1. Now - - as the winter moon sinks low
 2. Thus - - Ma-ry ponders in - - her heart



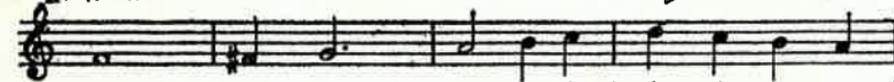
6 - 7 i | 2 i 7 6 | 5 - - - | 5 - 1 2 |
 1. And the poor shepherds all are gone - - There re-
 2. While the wind howls over the sky - - And the



3 - 3 - | 3 6 - 5 | 1 - 1 - | 1 5 - 4 | 3 - - - |
 1. mains in the manger stable The Virgin Mother
 2. caws low and asses bray And Baby Jesus



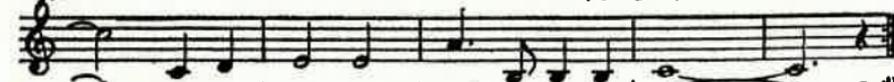
4 3 2 1 | 2 - - - | 2 - - - | 3 - - - | 4 3 #2 3 |
 1. seated all a- l- o- n- e Now as she caress-
 2. wakes and starts to c- r- y - - A- gain she caress-



4 - - - | #4 5 - | 6 - 7 i | 2 i 7 6 |
 1. es Her Child Under the flick'ring candle
 2. es her Child " " " " " "



2 - - - | 2 - 1 2 | 3 - 3 - | 3 6 - 5 | i - - - |
 1. i- i- g- h- t, O the thought that God's Son is born
 2. " " " " " He's born to die



1. - Sweeps o'er her soul this first Christmas n- i- g- h- t.
 2. - " " " " " " " " " "

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1946 Rev. (Dr.) Timothy Tow was on the verge of pursuing a very promising career when the sudden deaths of his beloved mother and daughter within five weeks stunned him to recall his vow to serve the Lord made a decade earlier during the John Sung Revival. Instead of taking the boat to London to study law he turned to Nanking to study theology. From there he went on to Faith Theological Seminary, USA, where he obtained the Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology. It was at Faith that he caught the inspiration to carry the torch of the 20th Century Reformation Movement (ICCC) to the Far East.

Rev. Tow has pastored Life B-P Church since 1950. In 1962 he founded Far Eastern Bible College, from which a hundred have graduated during the last 21 years. In recognition of his contribution to historic Christianity in this part of the world, Shelton College in 1964 honoured him with a Doctor of Divinity degree. Dr. Tow has authored and translated a number of books. Three of his poems composed in THE HOLY LAND were awarded first prizes by the Sunday Times. This, his latest work, is published in the hope that readers would find the Answer to life's many problems, and finding it, will enjoy life even more abundantly. Amen.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- 1) **An Anthology of Sermons and Verses**
- 2) **Songs and Verses from the Holy Land**
- 3) **Pioneering in Dyak Borneo by Jason Linn**
(Translation from Chinese)
- 4) **An Abridgment of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol. 1, Book I & II**
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- 6) **In John Sung's Steps —**
the Story of Lim Puay Hian